

Portals Crowned by the French Academy: Monsieur, Madame and

Gustave Droz

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Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: Monsieur, Madame and Bebe, v3

Gustave Droz

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BOOK 3.

CHAPTER XX. THE HOT-WATER BOTTLE

When midnight strikes, when the embers die away into ashes, when the lamp burns more feebly and your eyes close in spite of yourself, the best thing to do, dear Madame, is to go to bed.

Get up from your armchair, take off your bracelets, light your rosecolored taper, and proceed slowly, to the soft accompaniment of your trailing skirt, rustling across the carpet, to your dressing-room, that perfumed sanctuary in which your beauty, knowing itself to be alone, raises its veils, indulges in self-examination, revels in itself and reckons up its treasures as a miser does his wealth.

Before the muslin-framed mirror, which reveals all that it sees so well, you pause carelessly and with a smile give one long satisfied look, then with two fingers you withdraw the pin that kept up your hair, and its long, fair tresses unroll and fall in waves, veiling your bare shoulders. With a coquettish hand, the little finger of which is turned up, you caress, as you gather them together, the golden flood of your abundant locks, while with the other you pass through them the tortoiseshell comb that buries itself in the depths of this fair forest and bends with the effort.

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Your tresses are so abundant that your little hand can scarcely grasp them. They are so long that your outstretched arm scarcely reaches their extremity. Hence it is not without difficulty that you manage to twist them up and imprison them in your embroidered night-cap.

This first duty accomplished, you turn the silver tap, and the pure and limpid water pours into a large bowl of enamelled porcelain. You throw in a few drops of that fluid which perfumes and softens the skin, and like a nymph in the depths of a quiet wood preparing for the toilet, you remove the drapery that might encumber you.

But what, Madame, you frown? Have I said too much or not enough? Is it not well known that you love cold water; and do you think it is not guessed that at the contact of the dripping sponge you quiver from head to foot?

But what matters it, your toilette for the night is completed, you are fresh, restored, and white as a nun in your embroidered dressing-gown, you dart your bare feet into satin slippers and reenter your bedroom, shivering slightly. To see you walking thus with hurried steps, wrapped tightly in your dressing-gown, and with your pretty head hidden in its nightcap, you might be taken for a little girl leaving the confessional after confessing some terrible sin.

Gaining the bedside, Madame lays aside her slippers, and lightly and without effort, bounds into the depths of the alcove.

However, Monsieur, who was already asleep with his nose on the *Moniteur*, suddenly wakes up at the movement imparted to the bed.

"I thought that you were in bed already, dear," he murmurs, falling off to sleep again. "Good-night."

"If I had been in bed you would have noticed it." Madame stretches out her feet and moves them about; she seems to be in quest of something. "I am not in such a hurry to go to sleep as you are, thank goodness."

Monsieur, suddenly and evidently annoyed, says: "But what is the matter, my dear? You fidget and fidget I want to sleep." He turns over as he speaks.

"I fidget! I am simply feeling for my hot-water bottle; you are irritating."

"Your hot-water bottle?" is Monsieur's reply, with a grunt.

"Certainly, my hot-water bottle, my feet are frozen." She goes on feeling for it. "You are really very amiable this evening; you began by dozing over the '*Revue des Deux Mondes*', and I find you snoring over the '*Moniteur*'. In your place I should vary my literature. I am sure you have taken my hot-water bottle."

"I have been doing wrong. I will subscribe to the '*Tintamarre*' in future. Come, good-night, my dear." He turns over. "Hello, your hot-water bottle is right at the bottom of the bed; I can feel it with the tips of my toes."

"Well, push it up; do you think that I can dive down there after it?"

"Shall I ring for your maid to help you?" He makes a movement of ill-temper, pulls the clothes up to his chin, and buries his head in the pillow. "Goodnight, my dear."

Madame, somewhat vexed, says: "Good-night, goodnight."

The respiration of Monsieur grows smooth, and even his brows relax, his forehead becomes calm, he is on the point of losing all consciousness of the realities of this life.

Madame taps lightly on her husband's shoulder.

"Hum," growls Monsieur.

Madame taps again.

"Well, what is it?"

Madame, in an angelic tone of voice, "My dear, would you put out the candle?"

Monsieur, without opening his eyes, "The hot-water bottle, the candle, the candle, the hot-water bottle."

"Good heavens! how irritable you are, Oscar. I will put it out myself. Don't trouble yourself. You really have a very bad temper, my dear; you are angry, and if you were goaded a little, you would, in five minutes, be capable of anything."

Monsieur, his voice smothered in the pillow, "No, not at all; I am sleepy, dear, that is all. Good-night, my dear."

Madame, briskly, "You forget that in domestic life good feeling has for its basis reciprocal consideration."

"I was wrong come, good-night." He raises himself up a little. "Would you like me to kiss you?"

"I don't want you to, but I permit." She puts her face toward that of her husband, who kisses her on the forehead. "You are really too good, you have kissed my nightcap."

Monsieur, smiling, "Your hair smells very nice . . . You see I am so sleepy. Ah! you have it in little plaits, you are going to wave it to-morrow."

"To wave it. You were the first to find that that way of dressing it became me, besides, it is the fashion, and tomorrow is my reception day. Come, you irritable man, embrace me once for all and snore at your ease, you are dying to do so."

She holds her neck toward her husband.

Monsieur, laughing, "In the first place, I never snore. I never joke." He kisses his wife's neck, and rests his head on her shoulder.

"Well, what are you doing there?" is her remark.

"I am digesting my kiss."

Madame affects the lackadaisical, and looks sidewise at her husband with an eye half disarmed. Monsieur sniffs the loved perfume with open nostrils.

After a period of silence he whispers in his wife's ear, "I am not at all sleepy now, dear. Are your feet still cold? I will find the hot-water bottle."

"Oh, thanks, put out the light and let us go to sleep; I am quite tired out."

She turns round by resting her arm on his face.

"No, no, I won't have you go to sleep with your feet chilled; there is nothing worse. There, there is the hot-water bottle, warm your poor little feet . . . there . . . like that."

"Thanks, I am very comfortable. Good-night, dear, let us go to sleep."

"Good-night, my dear."

After a long silence Monsieur turns first on one side and then on the other, and ends by tapping lightly on his wife's shoulder.

Madame, startled, "What is the matter? Good heavens! how you startled me!"

Monsieur, smiling, "Would you be kind enough to put out the candle?"

"What! is it for that you wake me up in the middle of my sleep? I shall not be able to doze again. You are unbearable."

"You find me unbearable?" He comes quite close to his wife; "Come, let me explain my idea to you."

Madame turns round her eye meets the eye . . . full of softness . . . of her husband. "Dear me," she says, "you are a perfect tiger."

Then, putting her mouth to his ear, she murmurs with a smile, "Come, explain your idea, for the sake of peace and quiet."

Madame, after a very long silence, and half asleep, "Oscar!"

Monsieur, his eyes closed, in a faint voice, "My dear."

"How about the candle? it is still alight."

"Ah! the candle. I will put it out. If you were very nice you would give me a share of your hot-water bottle; one of my feet is frozen. Good-night."

"Good-night."

They clasp hands and fall asleep.

CHAPTER XXI. A LONGING

MONSIEUR and MADAME are quietly sitting together The clock has just struck ten MONSIEUR is in his dressing-gown and slippers, is leaning back in an armchair and reading the newspaper MADAME is carelessly working squares of laces.

Madame Such things have taken place, have they not, dear?

Monsieur (without raising his eyes) Yes, my dear.

Madame There, well I should never have believed it. But they are monstrous, are they not?

Monsieur (without raising his eyes) Yes, my dear.

Madame Well, and yet, see how strange it is, Louise acknowledged it to me last month, you know; the evening she called for me to go to the perpetual Adoration, and our hour of adoration, as it turned out, by the way, was from six to seven; impossible, too, to change our turn; none of the ladies caring to adore during dinner-time, as is natural enough. Good heavens, what a rage we were in! How good God must be to have forgiven you. Do you remember?

Monsieur (continuing to read) Yes, dear.

Madame Ah! you remember that you said, 'I don't care a . . .' Oh! but I won't repeat what you said, it is too naughty. How angry you were! 'I will go and dine at the restaurant, confound it!' But you did not say confound, ha! ha! ha! Well, I loved you just the same at that moment; it vexed me to see you in a rage on God's account, but for my own part I was pleased; I like to see you in a fury; your nostrils expand, and then your moustache bristles, you put me in mind of a lion, and I have always liked lions. When I was quite a child at the Zoological Gardens they could not get me away from them; I threw all my sous into their cage for them to buy gingerbread with; it was quite a passion. Well, to continue my story. (She looks toward her husband who is still reading, and after a pause,) Is it interesting—that which you are reading?

Monsieur (like a man waking up) What is it, my dear child? What I am reading? Oh, it would scarcely interest you. (With a grimace.) There are Latin phrases, you know, and, besides, I am hoarse. But I am listening, go, on. (He resumes his newspaper.)

Madame Well, to return to the perpetual Adoration, Louise confided to me, under the pledge of secrecy, that she was like me.

Monsieur Like you? What do you mean?

Madame Like me; that is plain enough.

Monsieur You are talking nonsense, my little angel, follies as great as your chignon. You women will end by putting pillows into your chignons.

Madame (resting her elbows on her husband's knees) But, after all, the instincts, the resemblances we have, must certainly be attributed to something. Can any one imagine, for instance, that God made your cousin as stupid as he is, and with a head like a pear?

Monsieur My cousin! my cousin! Ferdinand is only a cousin by marriage. I grant, however, that he is not very bright.

Madame Well, I am sure that his mother must have had a longing, or something.

Monsieur What can I do to help it, my angel?

Madame Nothing at all; but it clearly shows that such things are not to be laughed at; and if I were to tell you that I had a longing

Monsieur (letting fall his newspaper) The devil! a longing for what?

Madame Ah! there your nostrils are dilating; you are going to resemble a lion again, and I never shall dare to tell you. It is so extraordinary, and yet my mother had exactly the same longing.

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Monsieur Come, tell it me, you see that I am patient. If it is possible to gratify it, you know that I love you, my . . .
. Don't kiss me on the neck; you will make me jump up to the ceiling, my darling.

Madame Repeat those two little words. I am your darling, then?

Monsieur Ha ! ha! ha! She has little fingers which ha! ha! go into your neck—ha! ha! you will make me break something, nervous as I am.

Madame Well, break something. If one may not touch one's husband, one may as well go into a convent at once. (She puts her lips to MONSIEUR'S ear and coquettishly pulls the end of his moustache.) I shall not be happy till I have what I am longing for, and then it would be so kind of you to do it.

Monsieur Kind to do what? Come, dear, explain yourself.

Madame You must first of all take off that great, ugly dressing—gown, pull on your boots, put on your hat and go. Oh, don't make any faces; if you grumble in the least all the merit of your devotedness will disappear . . . and go to the grocer's at the corner of the street, a very respectable shop.

Monsieur To the grocer's at ten o'clock at night! Are you mad? I will ring for John; it is his business.

Madame (staying his hand) You indiscreet man. These are our own private affairs; we must not take any one into our confidence. I will go into your dressing—room to get your things, and you will put your boots on before the fire comfortably . . . to please me, Alfred, my love, my life. I would give my little finger to have . . .

Monsieur To have what, hang it all, what, what, what?

Madame (her face alight and fixing her eyes on him) I want a sou's worth of paste. Had not you guessed it?

Monsieur But it is madness, delirium, fol

Madame I said paste, dearest; only a sou's worth, wrapped in strong paper.

Monsieur No, no. I am kind—hearted, but I should reproach myself

Madame (closing his mouth with her little hands) Oh, not a word; you are going to utter something naughty. But when I tell you that I have a mad longing for it, that I love you as I have never loved you yet, that my mother had the same desire Oh! my poor mother (she weeps in her hands), if she could only know, if she were not at the other end of France. You have never cared for my parents; I saw that very well on our wedding—day, and (she sobs) it will be the sorrow of my whole life.

Monsieur (freeing himself and suddenly rising) Give me my boots.

Madame (with effusion) Oh, thanks, Alfred, my love, you are good, yes, you are good. Will you have your walking—stick, dear?

Monsieur I don't care. How much do you want of that abomination a franc's worth, thirty sous' worth, a louis' worth?

Madame You know very well that I would not make an abuse of it—only a sou's worth. I have some sous for mass; here, take one. Adieu, Alfred; be quick; be quick!

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(Exit MONSIEUR.)

Left alone, Madame wafts a kiss in her most tender fashion toward the door Monsieur has just closed behind him, then goes toward the glass and smiles at herself with pleasure. Then she lights the wax candle in a little candlestick, and quietly makes her way to the kitchen, noiselessly opens a press, takes out three little dessert plates, bordered with gold and ornamented with her initials, next takes from a box lined with white leather, two silver spoons, and, somewhat embarrassed by all this luggage, returns to her bedroom.

Then she pokes the fire, draws a little buhl table close up to the hearth, spreads a white cloth, sets out the plates, puts the spoons by them, and enchanted, impatient, with flushed complexion, leans back in an armchair. Her little foot rapidly taps the floor, she smiles, pouts she is waiting.

At last, after an interval of some minutes, the outer door is heard to close, rapid steps cross the drawingroom, Madame claps her hands and Monsieur comes in. He does not look very pleased, as he advances holding awkwardly in his left hand a flattened parcel, the contents of which may be guessed.

Madame (touching a gold-bordered plate and holding it out to her husband) Relieve yourself of it, dear. Could you not have been quicker?

Monsieur Quicker?

Madame Oh! I am not angry with you, that is not meant for a reproach, you are an angel; but it seems to me a century since you started.

Monsieur The man was just going to shut his shop up. My gloves are covered with it . . . it's sticky . . . it's horrid, pah! the abomination! At last I shall have peace and quietness.

Madame Oh! no harsh words, they hurt me so. But look at this pretty little table, do you remember how we supped by the fireside? Ah! you have forgotten it, a man's heart has no memory.

Monsieur Are you so mad as to imagine that I am going to touch it? Oh! indeed! that is carrying

Madame (sadly) See what a state you get in over a little favor I ask of you. If in order to please me you were to overcome a slight repugnance, if you were just to touch this nice, white jelly with you lips, where would be the harm?

Monsieur The harm! the harm! it would be ridiculous. Never.

Madame That is the reason? "It would be absurd." It is not from disgust, for there is nothing disgusting there, it is flour and water, nothing more. It is not then from a dislike, but out of pride that you refuse?

Monsieur (shrugging his shoulders) What you say is childish, puerile, silly. I do not care to answer it.

Madame And what you say is neither generous nor worthy of you, since you abuse your superiority. You see me at your feet pleading for an insignificant thing, puerile, childish, foolish, perhaps, but one which would give me pleasure, and you think it heroic not to yield. Do you want me to speak out, well? then, you men are unfeeling.

Monsieur Never.

Madame Why, you admitted it to me yourself one night, on the Pont des Arts, as we were walking home from the theatre.

Monsieur After all, there is no great harm in that.

Madame (sadly) I am not angry with you, this sternness is part of your nature, you are a rod of iron.

Monsieur I have some energy when it is needed, I grant you, but I have not the absurd pride you imagine, and there (he dips his finger in the paste and carries it to his lips), is the proof, you spoiled child. Are you satisfied? It has no taste, it is insipid.

Madame You were pretending.

Monsieur I swear to you . . .

Madame (taking a little soon, filling it with her precious paste and holding it to her husband's lips) I want to see the face you will make, love.

Monsieur (Puts out his lips, buries his two front teeth, with marked disgust, in the paste, makes a horrible face and spits into the fireplace) Eugh.

Madame (still holding the spoon and with much interest) Well?

Monsieur Well! it is awful! oh! awful! taste it.

Madame (dreamily stirring the paste with the spoon, her little finger in the air) I should never have believed that it was so nasty.

Monsieur You will soon see for yourself, taste it, taste it.

Madame I am in no hurry, I have plenty of time.

Monsieur To see what it is like. Taste a little, come.

Madame (pushing away the plate with a look of horror) Oh! how you worry me. Be quiet, do; for a trifle I could hate you. It is disgusting, this paste of yours!

CHAPTER XXII. FAMILY LIFE

It was the evening of the 15th of February. It was dreadfully cold. The snow drove against the windows and the wind whistled furiously under the doors. My two aunts, seated at a table in one corner of the drawing-room, gave vent from time to time to deep sighs, and, wriggling in their armchairs, kept casting uneasy glances toward the bedroom door. One of them had taken from a little leather bag placed on the table her blessed rosary and was repeating her prayers, while her sister was reading a volume of Voltaire's correspondence which she held at a distance from her eyes, her lips moving as she perused it.

For my own part, I was striding up and down the room, gnawing my moustache, a bad habit I have never been able to get rid of, and halting from time to time in front of Dr. C., an old friend of mine, who was quietly reading the paper in the most comfortable of the armchairs. I dared not disturb him, so absorbed did he seem in what he was reading, but in my heart I was furious to see him so quiet when I myself was so agitated.

Suddenly he tossed the paper on to the couch and, passing his hand across his bald and shining head, said:

"Ah! if I were a minister, it would not take long, no, it would not be very long You have read that article on Algerian cotton. One of two things, either irrigation But you are not listening to me, and yet it is a more serious matter than you think."

He rose, and with his hands in his pocket, walked across the room humming an old medical student's song. I followed him closely.

"Jacques," said I, as he turned round, "tell me frankly, are you satisfied?"

"Yes, yes, I am satisfied . . . observe my untroubled look," and he broke into his hearty and somewhat noisy laugh.

"You are not hiding anything from me, my dear fellow?"

"What a donkey you are, old fellow. I tell you that everything is going on well."

And he resumed his song, jingling the money in his pockets.

"All is going on well, but it will take some time," he went on. "Let me have one of your dressing-gowns. I shall be more comfortable for the night, and these ladies will excuse me, will they not?"

"Excuse you, I should think so, you, the doctor, and my friend!" I felt devotedly attached to him that evening.

"Well, then, if they will excuse me, you can very well let me have a pair of slippers."

At this moment a cry came from the next room and we distinctly heard these words in a stifled voice:

"Doctor . . . oh! mon Dieu! . . . doctor!"

"It is frightful," murmured my aunts.

"My dear friend," I exclaimed, seizing the doctor's arm, "you are quite sure you are not concealing anything from me?"

"If you have a very loose pair they will suit me best; I have not the foot of a young girl I am not concealing anything, I am not concealing anything What do you think I should hide from you? It is all going on very well, only as I said it will take time By the way, tell Joseph to get me one of your smokingcaps; once in dressing-gown and slippers a smokingcap is not out of the way, and I am getting bald, my dear Captain. How infernally cold it is here! These windows face the north, and there are no sand-bags. Mademoiselle de V.," he added, turning to my aunt, "you will catch cold."

Then as other sounds were heard, he said: "Let us go and see the little lady."

"Come here," said my wife, who had caught sight of me, in a low voice, "come here and shake hands with me." Then she drew me toward her and whispered in my ear: "You will be pleased to kiss the little darling, won't you?" Her voice was so faint and so tender as she said this, and she added: "Do not take your hand away, it gives me courage."

I remained beside her, therefore, while the doctor, who had put on my dressing-gown, vainly strove to button it.

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From time to time my poor little wife squeezed my hand violently, closing her eyes, but not uttering a cry. The fire sparkled on the hearth. The pendulum of the clock went on with its monotonous ticking, but it seemed to me that all this calm was only apparent, that everything about me must be in a state of expectation like myself and sharing my emotion. In the bedroom beyond, the door of which was ajar, I could see the end of the cradle and the shadow of the nurse who was dozing while she waited.

What I felt was something strange. I felt a new sentiment springing up in my heart, I seemed to have some foreign body within my breast, and this sweet sensation was so new to me that I was, as it were, alarmed at it. I felt the little creature, who was there without yet being there, clinging to me; his whole life unrolled itself before me. I saw him at the same time a child and a grown-up man; it seemed to me that my own life was about to be renewed in his and I felt from time to time an irresistible need of giving him something of myself.

Toward half-past eleven, the doctor, like a captain consulting his compass, pulled out his watch, muttered something and drew near the bed.

"Come, my dear lady," said he to my wife, "courage, we are all round you and all is going well; within five minutes you will hear him cry out."

My mother-in-law, almost beside herself, was biting her lips and each pang of the sufferer was reflected upon her face. Her cap had got disarranged in such a singular fashion that, under any other circumstances, I should have burst out laughing. At that moment I heard the drawing-room door open and saw the heads of my aunts, one above the other, and behind them that of my father, who was twisting his heavy white moustache with a grimace that was customary to him.

"Shut the door," cried the doctor, angrily, "don't bother me."

And with the greatest coolness in the world he turned to my mother-in-law and added, "I ask a thousand pardons."

But just then there was something else to think of than my old friend's bluntness.

"Is everything ready to receive him?" he continued, growling.

"Yes, my dear doctor," replied my mother-in-law.

At length, the doctor lifted into the air a little object which almost immediately uttered a cry as piercing as a needle. I shall never forget the impression produced on me by this poor little thing, making its appearance thus, all of a sudden, in the middle of the family. We had thought and dreamed of it; I had seen him in my mind's eye, my darling child, playing with a hoop, pulling my moustache, trying to walk, or gorging himself with milk in his nurse's arms like a gluttonous little kitten; but I had never pictured him to myself, inanimate, almost lifeless, quite tiny, wrinkled, hairless, grinning, and yet, charming, adorable, and be loved in spite of all—poor, ugly, little thing. It was a strange impression, and so singular that it is impossible to understand it, without having experienced it.

"What luck you have!" said the doctor, holding the child toward me; "it is a boy."

"A boy!"

"And a fine one."

"Really, a boy!"

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That was a matter of indifference to me now. What was causing me indescribable emotion was the living proof of paternity, this little being who was my own. I felt stupefied in presence of the great mystery of childbirth. My wife was there, fainting, overcame, and the little living creature, my own flesh, my own blood, was squalling and gesticulating in the hands of Jacques. I was overwhelmed, like a workman who had unconsciously produced a masterpiece. I felt myself quite small in presence of this quivering piece of my own handiwork, and, frankly, a little bit ashamed of having made it so well almost without troubling about it. I can not undertake to explain all this, I merely relate my impressions.

My mother-in-law held out her apron and the doctor placed the child on his grandmother's knees, saying: "Come, little savage, try not to be any worse than your rascal of a father. Now for five minutes of emotion. Come, Captain, embrace me."

We did so heartily. The doctor's little black eyes twinkled more brightly than usual; I saw very well that he was moved.

"Did it make you feel queer, Captain? I mean the cry? Ah! I know it, it is like a needle through the heart Where is the nurse? Ah! here she is. No matter, he is a fine boy, your little lancer. Open the door for the prisoners in the drawing-room."

I opened the door. Every one was listening on the other side of it. My father, my two aunts, still holding in their hands, one her rosary and the other her Voltaire, my own nurse, poor old woman, who had come in a cab.

"Well," they exclaimed anxiously, "well?"

"It is all over, it is a boy; go in, he is there."

You can not imagine how happy I was to see on all their faces the reflection of my own emotion. They embraced me and shook hands with me, and I responded to all these marks of affection without exactly knowing where they came from.

"Damn it all!" muttered my father, in my ear, holding me in his arms, with his stick still in his hand and his hat on his head, "Damn it all!"

But he could not finish, however brave he might wish to appear; a big tear was glittering at the tip of his nose. He muttered "Hum!" under his moustache and finally burst into tears on my shoulder, saying: "I can not help it."

And I did likewise I could not help it either.

However, everybody was flocking round the grandmamma, who lifted up a corner of her apron and said:

"How pretty he is, the darling, how pretty! Nurse, warm the linen, give me the caps."

"Smile at your aunty," said my aunt, jangling her rosary above the baby's head, "smile at aunty."

"Ask him at the same time to recite a fable," said the doctor.

Meanwhile my wife was coming to herself; she half opened her eyes and seemed to be looking for something.

"Where is he?" she murmured in a faint voice.

They showed her her mother's apron.

"A boy, is it not?"

Taking my hand, she drew me down toward her and said in a whisper, "Are you satisfied with me? I did my best, dear."

"Come, no emotion," exclaimed the doctor, "you shall kiss each other tomorrow. Colonel," he said to my father, who still retained his hat and stick, "keep them from kissing. No emotion, and every one outside. I am going to dress the little lancer. Give me the little man, grandmamma. Come here, little savage. You shall see whether I don't know how to fasten pins in."

He took the baby in his two large hands and sat down on a stool before the fire.

I watched my boy whom Jacques was turning about like a doll, but with great skill. He examined him all over, touching and feeling him, and at each test said with a smile:

"He is a fine one, he is a fine one."

Then he rolled him up in his clothes, put a triple cap on his little bald head, tied a folded ribbon under his chin to prevent his head falling backward, and then, satisfied with his work, said:

"You saw how I did it, nurse? Well, you must dress this lancer every morning in the same way. Nothing but a little sugar and water till to-morrow. The mother has no fever. Come, all is going on well.

Lucky Captain! I am so hungry. Do you know that it is one in the morning? You haven't got cold partridge or a bit of pie that you don't know what to do with, have you? It would suit me down to the ground, with a bottle of something."

We went both into the dining-room and laid the cloth without any more ceremony.

I never in my life ate and drank so much as on that occasion.

"Come, get off to bed," said the doctor, putting on his coat. "To-morrow morning you shall have the wet-nurse. No, by the way, I'll call for you, and we will go and choose her together; it is curious. Be under arms at half-past eight."

CHAPTER XXIII. NEW YEAR'S DAY

It is barely seven o'clock. A pale ray of daylight is stealing through the double curtains, and already some one is tapping at the door. I can hear in the next room from the stifled laughter and the silvery tones of Baby, who is quivering with impatience, and asking leave to come in.

"Papa," he cries, "it is Baby, it is Baby come for the New Year."

"Come in, my darling; come quick, and kiss us."

The door opens and my boy, his eyes aglow, and his arms raised, rushes toward the bed. His curls, escaping from the nightcap covering his head, float on his forehead. His long, loose night-shirt, catching his little feet, increases his impatience, and causes him to stumble at every step.

At length he crosses the room, and, holding out his two hands to mine: "Baby wishes you a Happy New Year," he

says, in an earnest voice.

"Poor little love, with his bare feet! Come, darling, and warm yourself under the counterpane."

I lift him toward me, but at this moment my wife, who is asleep, suddenly wakes.

"Who is there?" she exclaims, feeling for the bell. "Thieves!"

"It is we two, dear."

"Who? Good heavens! how you frightened me! I was dreaming the house was on fire, and that I heard your voice amid the raging flames. You were very indiscreet in shouting like that!"

"Shouting! but you forget, mamma, that it is New Year's Day, the day of smiles and kisses? Baby was waiting for you to wake up, as well as myself."

However, I wrap the little fellow up in the eiderdown quilt and warm his cold feet in my hands.

"Mamma, it is New Year's Day," he exclaims. With his arms he draws our two heads together, puts forward his own and kisses us at haphazard with his moist lips. I feel his dimpled fists digging into my neck, his little fingers entangled in my beard.

My moustache tickles the tip of his nose, and he bursts into a fit of joyous laughter as he throws his head back.

His mother, who has recovered from her fright, takes him in her arms and rings the bell.

"The year is beginning well, dear," she says, "but we must have a little daylight."

"Mamma, naughty children don't have any new toys on New Year's Day, do they?"

And as he says this the sly fellow eyes a pile of parcels and packages heaped up in one corner, visible despite the semidarkness.

Soon the curtains are drawn aside, and the shutters opened; daylight floods the room; the fire crackles merrily on the hearth, and two large parcels, carefully tied up, are placed on the bed. One is for my wife, and the other for my boy.

"What is it? What is it?" I have multiplied the knots and tripled the wrappings, and I gleefully follow their impatient fingers entangled among the strings.

My wife gets impatient, smiles, pouts, kisses me, and asks for the scissors.

Baby on his side tugs with all his might, biting his lips as he does so, and ends by asking my help. His look strives to penetrate the wrappers. All the signs of desire and expectation are stamped on his face. His hand, hidden under the coverlet, causes the silk to rustle with his convulsive movements, and his lips quiver as at the approach of some dainty.

At length the last paper falls aside. The lid is lifted, and joy breaks forth.

"A fur tippet!"

"A Noah's ark!"

"To match my muff, dear, kind husband."

"With a Noah on wheels, dear papa. I do love you so."

They throw themselves on my neck, four arms are clasped round me at once. Emotion gets the better of me, and a tear steals into my eye. There are two in those of my wife, and Baby, losing his head, sobs as he kisses my hand.

It is absurd.

Absurd, I don't know; but delightful, I can answer for it.

Does not grief, after all, call forth enough tears for us to forgive joy the solitary one she perchance causes us to shed!

Life is not so sweet for us to risk ourselves in it singlehanded, and when the heart is empty the way seems very long.

It is so pleasant to feel one's self loved, to hear beside one the cadenced steps of one's fellow-travellers, and to say, "They are here, our three hearts beat in unison." So pleasant once a year, when the great clock strikes the first of January, to sit down beside the path, with hands locked together, and eyes fixed on the unknown dusty road losing itself in the horizon, and to say, while embracing one another, "We still love one another, my dear children; you rely on me, and I rely on you. Let us have confidence, and walk steadfastly."

This is how I explain that one may weep a little while examining a new fur tippet and opening a Noah's ark.

But breakfast time draws near. I have cut myself twice while shaving; I have stepped on my son's wild beasts in turning round, and I have the prospect of a dozen duty calls, as my wife terms them, before me; yet I am delighted.

We sit down to the breakfast table, which has a more than usually festive aspect. A faint aroma of truffles perfumes the air, every one is smiling, and through the glass I see, startling sight! the doorkeeper, with his own hands, wiping the handrail of the staircase. It is a glorious day.

Baby has ranged his elephants, lions, and giraffes round his plate, and his mother, under pretext of a draught, breakfasts in her tippet.

"Have you ordered the carriage, dear, for our visits?" I ask.

"That cushion for Aunt Ursula will take up such a deal of room. It might be put beside the coachman."

"Poor aunt."

"Papa, don't let us go to Aunt Ursula," said Baby; "she pricks so when she kisses you."

"Naughty boy . . . Think of all we have to get into the carriage. Leon's rocking-horse, Louise's muff, your father's slippers, Ernestine's quilt, the bonbons, the work-box. I declare, aunt's cushion must go under the coachman's feet."

"Papa, why doesn't the giraffe eat cutlets?"

"I really don't know, dear."

"Neither do I, papa."

An hour later we are ascending the staircase leading to Aunt Ursula's. My wife counts the steps as she pulls herself up by the hand-rail, and I carry the famous cushion, the bonbons, and my son, who has insisted on bringing his giraffe with him.

Aunt Ursula, who produces the same effect on him as the sight of a rod would, is waiting us in her icy little drawing-room. Four square armchairs, hidden beneath yellow covers, stand vacant behind four little mats. A clock in the shape of a pyramid, surmounted on a sphere, ticks under a glass case.

A portrait on the wall, covered with fly-spots, shows a nymph with a lyre, standing beside a waterfall. This nymph was Aunt Ursula. How she has altered!

"My dear aunt, we have come to wish you a Happy New Year."

"To express our hopes that "

"Thank you, nephew, thank you, niece," and she points to two chairs. "I am sensible of this step on your part; it proves to me that you have not altogether forgotten the duties imposed upon you by family ties."

"You are reckoning, my dear aunt, without the affection we feel for you, and which of itself is enough . . . Baby, go and kiss your aunt."

Baby whispers in my ear, "But, papa, I tell you she does prick."

I place the bonbons on a side-table.

"You can, nephew, dispense with offering me that little gift; you know that sweetmeats disagree with me, and, if I were not aware of your indifference as to the state of my health, I should see in your offering a veiled sarcasm. But let that pass. Does your father still bear up against his infirmities courageously?"

"Thank you, yes."

"I thought to please you, dear aunt," observes my wife, "by embroidering for you this cushion, which I beg you to accept."

"I thank you, child, but I can still hold myself sufficiently upright, thank God, not to have any need of a cushion. The embroidery is charming, it is an Oriental design. You might have made a better choice, knowing that I like things much more simple. It is charming, however, although this red next to the green here sets one's teeth on edge. Taste in colors is, however, not given to every one. I have, in return, to offer you my photograph, which that dear Abbe Miron insisted on my having taken."

"How kind you are, and how like you it is! Do you recognize your aunt, Baby?"

"Do not think yourself obliged to speak contrary to your opinion. This photograph does not in any way resemble me, my eyes are much brighter. I have also a packet of jujubes for your child. He seems to have grown."

"Baby, go and kiss your aunt."

"And then we shall go, mamma?"

"You are very rude, my dear."

"Let him speak out; at any rate, he is frank. But I see that your husband is getting impatient, you have other . . . errands to fulfil; I will not keep you. Besides, I am going to church to pray for those who do not pray for themselves."

From twelve duty calls, subtract one duty call, and eleven remain. Hum! "Coachman, Rue St. Louis au Marais."

"Papa, has Aunt Ursula needles in her chin?"

Let us pass over the eleven duty calls, they are no more agreeable to write of than to make.

Toward seven o'clock, heaven be praised, the horses stop before my father's, where dinner awaits us. Baby claps his hands, and smiles at old Jeannette, who, at the sound of the wheels, has rushed to the door. "Here they are," she exclaims, and she carries off Baby to the kitchen, where my mother, with her sleeves turned up, is giving the finishing touch to her traditional plum cake.

My father, on his way to the cellar, lantern in hand, and escorted by his old servant, Jean, who is carrying the basket, halts. "Why, children, how late you are! Come to my arms, my dears; this is the day on which one kisses in good earnest. Jean, hold my lantern a minute." And as my old father clasps me to his breast, his hand seeks out mine and grasps it, with a long clasp. Baby, who glides in between our legs, pulls our coat-tails and holds up his little mouth for a kiss too.

"But I am keeping you here in the anteroom and you are frozen; go into the drawing-room, there are a good fire and good friends there."

They have heard us, the door opens, and a number of arms are held out to us. Amid handshakings, embracings, good wishes, and kisses, boxes are opened, bonbons are showered forth, parcels are undone, mirth becomes deafening, and good humor tumultuous. Baby standing amid his presents resembles a drunken man surrounded by a treasure, and from time to time gives a cry of joy on discovering some fresh toy.

"The little man's fable," exclaims my father, swinging his lantern which he has taken again from Jean.

A deep silence ensues, and the poor child, whose debut in the elocutionary art it is, suddenly loses countenance. He casts down his eyes, blushes and takes refuge in the arms of his mother, who, stooping down, whispers, "Come, darling, 'A lamb was quenching'; you know the wolf and the lamb."

"Yes, mamma, I know the little lamb that wanted to drink." And in a contrite voice, his head bent down on his breast, he repeats with a deep sigh, "'A little lamb was quenching his thirst in a clear stream.'"

We all, with ears on the alert and a smile on our lips, follow his delightful little jargon.

Uncle Bertrand, who is rather deaf, has made an ear trumpet of his hand and drawn his chair up. "Ah! I can follow it," he says. "It is the fox and the grapes." And as there is a murmur of "Hush," at this interruption, he adds: "Yes, yes, he recites with intelligence, great intelligence."

Success restores confidence to my darling, who finishes his fable with a burst of laughter. Joy is communicative, and we take our places at table amid the liveliest mirth.

"By the way," says my father, "where the deuce is my lantern. I have forgotten all about the cellar. Jean, take your basket and let us go and rummage behind the fagots."

The soup is smoking, and my mother, after having glanced smilingly round the table, plunges her ladle into the tureen. Give me the family dinner table at which those we love are seated, at which we may risk resting our elbows at dessert, and at which at thirty we once more taste the wine offered at our baptism.

CHAPTER XXIV. LETTERS OF A YOUNG MOTHER TO HER FRIEND.

The little caps are the ones I want, Marie. Be good enough to send me the pattern of the braces, those of your own invention, you know. Thanks for your coverlet, it is soft, flexible, warm, and charming, and Baby, amid its white wool, looks like a rosebud hidden in the snow. I am becoming poetical, am I not? But what would you have? My poor heart is overflowing with joy. My son, do you understand that, dear, my own son? When I heard the sharp cry of the little being whom my mother showed me lying in her apron, it seemed to me that a burning thrill of love shot through my veins. My old doctor's bald head was close to me, I caught hold of it and kissed him thrice.

"Calm yourself, my dear child," said he.

"Doctor, be quiet, or I will kiss you again. Give me my baby, my love. Are you quite sure it is a boy?"

And in the adjoining drawing-room, where the whole family were waiting, I could hear amid the sound of kisses, the delightful words, "It is a boy, a fine boy."

My poor husband, who for twelve hours had not left me, overcome with fatigue and emotion, was crying and laughing in one corner of the room.

"Come, nurse, swaddle him, quick now. No pins, confound it all, strings, I will have strings. What? Give me the child, you don't understand anything about it."

And the good doctor in the twinkling of an eye had dressed my child.

"He looks a Colonel, your boy. Put him into the cradle with . . . now be calm, my dear patient . . . with a hot-water bottle to his feet. Not too much fire, especially in the Colonel's room. Now, no more noise, repose, and every one out of the way."

And as through the opening of the door which was just ajar, Aunt Ursula whispered, "Doctor, let me come in; just to press her hand, doctor."

"Confound it! every one must be off; silence and quiet are absolutely necessary." They all left.

"Octave," continued the doctor, "come and kiss your wife now, and make an end of it. Good little woman, she has been very brave . . . Octave, come and kiss your wife, and be quick about it if you don't want me to kiss her myself. I will do what I say," he added, threatening to make good his words.

Octave, buried in his child's cradle, did not hear.

"Good, now he is going to suffocate my Colonel for me."

My husband came at length. He held out his hand which was quivering with emotion, and I grasped it with all my might. If my heart at that moment did not break from excess of feeling, it was because God no doubt knew that I

should still have need of it.

You know, dear Marie, that before a child comes we love each other as husband and wife, but we love each other on our own account, while afterward we love each other on his, the dear love, who with his tiny hand has rivetted the chain forever. God, therefore, allows the heart to grow and swell. Mine was full; nevertheless, my baby came and took his place in it. Yet nothing overflowed, and I still feel that there is room for mother and yourself. You told me, and truly, that this would be a new life, a life of deep love and delightful devotion. All my past existence seems trivial and colorless to me, and I perceive that I am beginning to live. I am as proud as a soldier who has been in battle. Wife and mother, those words are our epaulettes. Grandmother is the field-marshal's baton.

How sweet I shall render the existence of my two loved ones!

How I shall cherish them! I am wild, I weep, I should like to kiss you. I am afraid I am too happy.

My husband is really good. He holds the child with such pleasing awkwardness, it costs him such efforts to lift this slight burden. When he brings it to me, wrapped in blankets, he walks with slow and careful steps. One would think that the ground was going to crumble away beneath his feet. Then he places the little treasure in my bed, quite close to me, on a large pillow. We deck Baby; we settle him comfortably, and if after many attempts we get him to smile, it is an endless joy. Often my husband and I remain in the presence of this tiny creature, our heads resting on our hands. We silently follow the hesitating and charming movements of his little rosy-nailed hand on the silk, and we find in this so deep a charm that it needs a considerable counter-attraction to tear us away.

We have most amusing discussions on the shape of his forehead and the color of his eyes, which always end in grand projects for his future, very silly, no doubt, but so fascinating.

Octave wants him to follow a diplomatic career. He says that he has the eye of a statesman and that his gestures, though few, are full of meaning. Poor, dear little ambassador, with only three hairs on your head! But what dear hairs they are, those threads of gold curling at the back of his neck, just above the rosy fold where the skin is so fine and so fresh that kisses nestle there of themselves.

The whole of this little body has a perfume which intoxicates me and makes my heart leap. What, dear friend, are the invisible ties which bind us to our children? Is it an atom of our own soul, a part of our own life, which animates and vivifies them? There must be something of the kind, for I can read amid the mists of his little mind. I divine his wishes, I know when he is cold, I can tell when he is hungry.

Do you know the most delightful moment? It is when after having taken his evening meal and gorged himself with milk like a gluttonous little kitten, he falls asleep with his rosy cheek resting on my arm. His limbs gently relax, his head sinks down on my breast, his eyes close, and his half-opened mouth continues to repeat the action of suckling.

His warm, moist breath brushes the hand that is supporting him. Then I wrap him up snugly in my turned-up skirt, hide his little feet under his clothes and watch my darling. I have him there, all to myself, on my knees. There is not a quiver of his being that escapes me or that does not vibrate in myself. I feel at the bottom of my heart a mirror that reflects them all. He is still part of me. Is it not my milk that nourishes him, my voice that hushes him off to sleep, my hand that dresses and caresses, encourages and supports him? The feeling that I am all in all for him further adds a delicious charm of protection to the delight of having brought him into the world.

When I think that there are women who pass by such joys without turning their heads. The fools!

Yes, the present is delightful and I am drunk with happiness. There is also the future, far away in the clouds. I often think of it, and I do not know why I shudder at the approach of a storm.

Madness! I shall love him so discreetly, I shall render the weight of my affection so light for him, that why should he wish to separate from me? Shall I not in time become his friend? Shall I not when a black down shadows those rosy little lips, when the bird, feeling its wings grown, seeks to leave the nest, shall I not be able to bring him back by invisible ties to the arms in which he now is sleeping? Perhaps at that wretched moment they call a man's youth you will forget me, my little darling! Other hands than mine perhaps will brush the hair away from your forehead at twenty. Alas! other lips, pressed burningly where mine are now pressed, will wipe out with a kiss twenty years of caresses. Yes, but when you return from this intoxicating and fatiguing journey, tired and exhausted, you will soon take refuge in the arms that once nursed you, you will rest your poor, aching head where it rests now, you will ask me to wipe away your tears and to make you forget the bruises received on the way, and I shall give you, weeping for joy, the kiss which at once consoles and fills with hope.

But I see that I am writing a whole volume, dear Marie. I will not re-read it or I should never dare to send it to you. What would you have? I am losing my head a little. I am not yet accustomed to all this happiness.

Yours affectionately.

CHAPTER XXV. FOUR YEARS LATER

Yes, my dear, he is a man and a man for good and all. He has come back from the country half as big again and as bold as a lion. He climbs on to the chairs, stops the clocks and sticks his hands in his pockets like a grown-up person.

When I see in the morning in the anteroom my baby's little shoes standing proudly beside the paternal boots, I experience, despite myself, a return toward that past which is yet so near. Yesterday swaddling clothes, today boots, tomorrow spurs. Ah! how the happy days fly by. Already four years old. I can scarcely carry him, even supposing he allowed me to, for his manly dignity is ticklish. He passes half his life armed for war, his pistols, his guns, his whips and his swords are all over the place. There is a healthy frankness about all his doings that charms me.

Do you imagine from this that my demon no longer has any good in him? At times he is an angel and freely returns the caresses I bestow upon him. In the evening after dinner he gets down into my armchair, takes my head in his hands and arranges my hair in his own way. His fresh little mouth travels all over my face. He imprints big sounding kisses on the back of my neck, which makes me shudder all over. We have endless talks together. "Why's" come in showers, and all these "why's" require real answers; for the intelligence of children is above all things logical. I will only give one of his sayings as a proof.

His grandmother is rather unwell, and every night he tacks on to his prayer these simple words, "Please God make Granny well, because I love her so." But for greater certainty he has added on his own account, "You know, God, Granny who lives in the Rue Saint-Louis, on the first floor." He says all this with an expression of simple confidence and such comic seriousness, the little love. You understand, it is to spare God the trouble of looking for the address.

I leave you; I hear him cough. I do not know whether he has caught cold, but I think he has been looking rather depressed since the morning. Do not laugh at me, I am not otherwise uneasy.

Yours most affectionately.

Yesterday there was a consultation. On leaving the house my old doctor's eyes were moist; he strove to hide it, but I saw a tear. My child must be very ill then? The thought is dreadful, dear. They seek to reassure me, but I tremble.

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The night has not brought any improvement. Still this fever. If you could see the state of the pretty little body we used to admire so. I will not think of what God may have in store for me. Ice has been ordered to be put to his head. His hair had to be cut off. Poor fair little curls that used to float in the wind as he ran after his hoop. It is terrible. I have dreadful forebodings.

My child, my poor child! He is so weak that not a word comes now from his pale parched lips. His large eyes that still shine in the depths of their sockets, smile at me from time to time, but this smile is so gentle, so faint, that it resembles a farewell. A farewell! But what would become of me?

This morning, thinking he was asleep, I could not restrain a sob. His lips opened, and he said, but in a whisper so low that I had to put my ear close down to catch it: "You do love me then, mamma?"

Do I love him? I should die.

NICE.

They have brought me here and I feel no better for it. Every day my weakness increases. I still spit blood. Besides, what do they seek to cure me of?

Yours as ever.

If I should never return to Paris, you will find in my wardrobe his last toys; the traces of his little fingers are still visible on them. To the left is the branch of the blessed box that used to hang at his bedside. Let your hands alone touch all this. Burn these dear relics, this poor evidence of shattered happiness. I can still see . . . Sobs are choking me.

Farewell, dear friend. What would you? I built too high on too unstable a soil. I loved one object too well.

Yours from my heart.

CHAPTER XXVI. OLD RECOLLECTIONS

Cover yourselves with fine green leaves, tall trees casting your peaceful shade. Steal through the branches, bright sunlight, and you, studious promenaders, contemplative idlers, mammas in bright toilettes, gossiping nurses, noisy children, and hungry babies, take possession of your kingdom; these long walks belong to you.

It is Sunday. Joy and festivity. The gaufre seller decks his shop and lights his stove. The white cloth is spread on the table and piles of golden cakes attract the customer.

The woman who lets out chairs has put on her apron with its big pockets for sous. The park keeper, my dear little children, has curled his moustache, polished up his harmless sword and put on his best uniform. See how bright and attractive the marionette theatre looks in the sunshine, under its striped covering.

Sunday requires all this in its honor.

Unhappy are those to whom the tall trees of Luxembourg gardens do not recall one of those recollections which cling to the heart like its first perfume to a vase.

I was a General, under those trees, a General with a plume like a mourning coach-horse, and armed to the teeth. I held command from the hut of the newspaper vendor to the kiosk of the gaufre seller. No false modesty, my authority extended to the basin of the fountain, although the great white swans rather alarmed me. Ambushes behind the tree trunks, advanced posts behind the nursemaids, surprises, fights with cold steel; attacks by

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skirmishers, dust, encounters, carnage and no bloodshed. After which our mammas wiped our foreheads, rearranged our dishevelled hair, and tore us away from the battle, of which we dreamed all night.

Now, as I pass through the garden with its army of children and nurses, leaning on my stick with halting step, how I regret my General's cocked hat, my paper plume, my wooden sword and my pistol. My pistol that would snap caps and was the cause of my rapid promotion.

Disport yourselves, little folks; gossip, plump nurses, as you scold your soldiers. Embroider peaceably, young mothers, making from time to time a little game of your neighbors among yourselves; and you, reflective idlers, look at that charming picture—babies making a garden.

Playing in the sand, a game as old as the world and always amusing. Hillocks built up in a line with little bits of wood stuck into them, represent gardens in the walks of which baby gravely places his little uncertain feet. What would he not give, dear little man, to be able to complete his work by creating a pond in his park, a pond, a gutter, three drops of water?

Further on the sand is damper, and in the mountain the little fingers pierce a tunnel. A gigantic work which the boot of a passer-by will soon destroy. What passer-by respects a baby's mountain? Hence the young rascal avenges himself. See that gentleman in the brown frockcoat, who is reading the 'Revue des Deux Mondes' on the bench; our workers have piled up hillocks of sand and dust around him, the skirts of his coat have already lost their color.

But let this equipage noisily dashing along go by. Four horses, two bits of string, and a fifth horse who is the driver. That is all, and yet one fancies one's self in a postchaise. How many places has one not visited by nightfall?

There are drivers who prefer to be horses, there are horses who would rather be drivers; first symptoms of ambition.

And the solitary baby who slowly draws his omnibus round the gaufre seller, eyeing his shop! An indefatigable consumer, but a poor paymaster.

Do you see down there under the plane-trees that group of nurses, a herd of Burgundian milch kine, and at their feet, rolling on a carpet, all those little rosy cheeked philosophers who only ask God for a little sunshine, pure milk, and quiet, in order to be happy. Frequently an accident disturbs the delightful calm. The Burgundian who mistrusted matters darts forward. It is too late.

"The course of a river is not to be checked," says Giboyer.

Sometimes the disaster is still more serious, and one repairs it as one can; but the philosopher who loves these disasters is indignant and squalls, swearing to himself to begin again.

Those little folk are delightful; we love children, but this affection for the species in general becomes yet more sweet when it is no longer a question of a baby, but of one's own baby.

Bachelors must not read what follows; I wish to speak to the family circle. Between those of a trade there is a better understanding.

I am a father, my dear madame, and have been of course the rejoicing papa of a matchless child. From beneath his cap there escaped a fair and curly tress that was our delight, and when I touched his white neck with my finger he broke into a laugh and showed me his little white pearls, as he clasped my head in his two chubby arms.

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His first tooth was an event. We went into the light the better to see. The grandparents looked through their glasses at the little white spot, and I, with outstretched neck, demonstrated, explained and proved. And all at once I ran off to the cellar to seek out in the right corner a bottle of the best.

My son's first tooth. We spoke of his career during dinner, and at dessert grand-mamma gave us a song.

After this tooth came others, and with them tears and pain, but then when they were all there how proudly he bit into his slice of bread, how vigorously he attacked his chop in order to eat "like papa."

"Like papa," do you remember how these two words warm the heart, and how many transgressions they cause to be forgiven.

My great happiness, is it yours too? was to be present at my darling's awakening. I knew the time. I would gently draw aside the curtains of his cradle and watch him as I waited.

I usually found him stretched diagonally, lost in the chaos of sheets and blankets, his legs in the air, his arms crossed above his head. Often his plump little hand still clutched the toy that had helped to send him off to sleep, and through his parted lips came the regular murmur of his soft breathing. The warmth of his sleep had given his cheeks the tint of a well-ripened peach. His skin was warm, and the perspiration of the night glittered on his forehead in little imperceptible pearls.

Soon his hand would make a movement; his foot pushed away the blanket, his whole body stirred, he rubbed an eye, stretched out his arms, and then his look from under his scarcely raised eyelids would rest on me.

He would smile at me, murmuring softly, so softly that I would hold my breath to seize all the shades of his music.

"Dood mornin', papa."

"Good morning, my little man; have you slept well?"

We held out our arms to each other and embraced like old friends.

Then the talking would begin. He chatted as the lark would sing to the rising sun. Endless stories.

He would tell me his dreams, asking after each sentence for "his nice, warm bread and milk, with plenty of sugar." And when his breakfast came up, what an outburst of laughter, what joy as he drew himself up to reach it; then his eye would glitter with a tear in the corner, and the chatter begin again.

At other times he would come and surprise me in bed. I would pretend to be asleep, and he would pull my beard and shout in my ear. I feigned great alarm and threatened to be avenged. From this arose fights among the counterpanes, entrenchments behind the pillows. In sign of victory I would tickle him, and then he shuddered, giving vent to the frank and involuntary outburst of laughter of happy childhood. He buried his head between his two shoulders like a tortoise withdrawing into his shell, and threatened me with his plump rosy foot. The skin of his heel was so delicate that a young girl's cheek would have been proud of it. How many kisses I would cover those dear little feet with when I warmed his long nightdress before the fire.

I had been forbidden to undress him, because it had been found that I entangled the knots instead of undoing them.

All this was charming, but when it was necessary to act rigorously and check the romping that was going too far, he would slowly drop his eyelids, while with dilated nostrils and trembling lips he tried to keep back the big tear glittering beneath his eyelid.

What courage was not necessary in order to refrain from calming with a kiss the storm on the point of bursting, from consoling the little swollen heart, from drying the tear that was overflowing and about to become a flood.

A child's expression is then so touching, there is so much grief in a warm tear slowly falling, in a little contracted face, a little heaving breast.

All this is long past. Yet years have gone by without effacing these loved recollections; and now that my baby is thirty years old and has a heavy moustache, when he holds out his large hand and says in his bass voice, "Good morning, father," it still seems to me that an echo repeats afar off the dear words of old, "Dood mornin', papa."

CHAPTER XXVII. THE LITTLE BOOTS

In the morning when I left my room, I saw placed in line before the door his boots and mine. His were little laced-up boots rather out of shape, and dulled by the rough usage to which he subjects them. The sole of the left boot was worn thin, and a little hole was threatening at the toe of the right. The laces, worn and slack, hung to the right and left. Swellings in the leather marked the places of his toes, and the accustomed movements of his little foot had left their traces in the shape of creases, slight or deep.

Why have I remembered all this? I really do not know, but it seems to me that I can still see the boots of the dear little one placed there on the mat beside my own, two grains of sand by two paving stones, a tom tit beside an elephant. They were his every-day boots, his playfellows, those with which he ascended sand hills and explored puddles. They were devoted to him, and shared his existence so closely that something of himself was met with again in them. I should have recognized them among a thousand; they had an especial physiognomy about them; it seemed to me that an invisible tie attached them to him, and I could not look at their undecided shape, their comic and charming grace, without recalling their little master, and acknowledging to myself that they resembled him.

Everything belonging to a baby becomes a bit babyish itself, and assumes that expression of unstudied and simple grace peculiar to a child.

Beside these laughing, gay, good-humored little boots, only asking leave to run about the country, my own seemed monstrous, heavy, coarse, ridiculous, with their heels. From their heavy and disabused air one felt that for them life was a grave matter, its journeys long, and the burden borne quite a serious one.

The contrast was striking, and the lesson deep. I would softly approach these little boots in order not to wake the little man who was still asleep in the adjoining room; I felt them, I turned them over, I looked at them on all sides, and I found a delightful smile rise to my lips. Never did the old violet-scented glove that lay for so long in the inmost recess of my drawer procure me so sweet an emotion.

Paternal love is no trifle; it has its follies and weaknesses, it is puerile and sublime, it can neither be analyzed nor explained, it is simply felt, and I yielded myself to it with delight.

Let the papa without weakness cast the first stone at me; the mammas will avenge me.

Remember that this little laced boot, with a hole in the toe, reminded me of his plump little foot, and that a thousand recollections were connected with that dear trifle.

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I recalled him, dear child, as when I cut his toe nails, wriggling about, pulling at my beard, and laughing in spite of himself, for he was ticklish.

I recalled him as when of an evening in front of a good fire, I pulled off his little socks. What a treat.

I would say "one, two." And he, clad in his long nightgown, his hands lost in the sleeves, would wait with glittering eyes, and ready to break into a fit of laughter for the "three."

At last after a thousand delays, a thousand little teasings that excited his impatience and allowed me to snatch five or six kisses, I said "three."

The sock flew away. Then there was a wild joy; he would throw himself back on my arm, waving his bare legs in the air. From his open mouth, in which two rows of shining little pearls could be distinguished, welled forth a burst of ringing laughter.

His mother, who, however, laughed too, would say the next minute, "Come, baby, come, my little angel, you will get cold But leave off. . . . Will you have done, you little demon?"

She wanted to scold, but she could not be serious at the sight of his fair-haired head, and flushed, smiling, happy face, thrown back on my knee.

She would look at me, and say:

"He is unbearable. Good gracious! what a child."

But I understood that this meant:

"Look how handsome, sturdy and healthy he is, our baby, our little man, our son."

And indeed he was adorable; at least I thought so.

I had the wisdom I can say it now that my hair is white not to let one of those happy moments pass without amply profiting by it, and really I did well. Pity the fathers who do not know how to be papas as often as possible, who do not know how to roll on the carpet, play at being a horse, pretend to be the great wolf, undress their baby, imitate the barking of the dog, and the roar of the lion, bite whole mouthfuls without hurting, and hide behind armchairs so as to let themselves be seen.

Pity sincerely these unfortunates. It is not only pleasant child's play that they neglect, but true pleasure, delightful enjoyment, the scraps of that happiness which is greatly calumniated and accused of not existing because we expect it to fall from heaven in a solid mass when it lies at our feet in fine powder. Let us pick up the fragments, and not grumble too much; every day brings us with its bread its ration of happiness.

Let us walk slowly and look down on the ground, searching around us and seeking in the corners; it is there that Providence has its hiding-places.

I have always laughed at those people who rush through life at full speed, with dilated nostrils, uneasy eyes, and glance rivetted on the horizon. It seems as though the present scorched their feet, and when you say to them, "Stop a moment, alight, take a glass of this good old wine, let us chat a little, laugh a little, kiss your child."

"Impossible," they reply; "I am expected over there. There I shall converse, there I shall drink delicious wine, there I shall give expansion to paternal love, there I shall be happy!"

And when they do get "there," breathless and tired out, and claim the price of their fatigue, the present, laughing behind its spectacles, says, "Monsieur, the bank is closed."

The future promises, it is the present that pays, and one should have a good understanding with the one that keeps the keys of the safe.

Why fancy that you are a dupe of Providence?

Do you think that Providence has the time to serve up to each of you perfect happiness, already dressed on a golden plate, and to play music during your repast into the bargain? Yet that is what a great many people would like.

We must be reasonable, tuck up our sleeves and look after our cooking ourselves, and not insist that heaven should put itself out of the way to skim our soup.

I used to muse on all this of an evening when my baby was in my arms, and his moist, regular breathing fanned my hand. I thought of the happy moments he had already given me, and was grateful to him for them.

"How easy it is," I said to myself, "to be happy, and what a singular fancy that is of going as far as China in quest of amusement.

My wife was of my opinion, and we would sit for hours by the fire talking of what we felt.

"You, do you see, dear? love otherwise than I do," she often said to me. "Papas calculate more. Their love requires a return. They do not really love their child till the day on which their self-esteem as its father is flattered. There is something of ownership in it. You can analyze paternal love, discover its causes, say 'I love my child because he is so and so, or so and so.' With the mother such analysis is impossible, she does not love her child because he is handsome or ugly, because he does or does not resemble her, has or has not her tastes. She loves him because she can not help it, it is a necessity. Maternal love is an innate sentiment in woman. Paternal love is, in man, the result of circumstances. In her love is an instinct, in him a calculation, of which, it is true, he is unconscious, but, in short, it is the outcome of several other feelings."

"That is all very fine; go on," I said. "We have neither heart nor bowels, we are fearful savages. What you say is monstrous." And I stirred the logs furiously with the tongs.

Yet my wife was right, I acknowledged to myself. When a child comes into the world the affection of the father is not to be compared to that of the mother. With her it is love already. It seems that she has known him for a long time, her pretty darling. At his first cry it might be said that she recognized him. She seems to say, "It is he." She takes him without the slightest embarrassment, her movements are natural, she shows no awkwardness, and in her two twining arms the baby finds a place to fit him, and falls asleep contentedly in the nest created for him. It would be thought that woman serves a mysterious apprenticeship to maternity. Man, on the other hand, is greatly troubled by the birth of a child. The first wail of the little creature stirs him, but in this emotion there is more astonishment than love. His affection is not yet born. His heart requires to reflect and to become accustomed to these fondnesses so new to him.

There is an apprenticeship to be served to the business of a father. There is none to that of a mother.

If the father is clumsy morally in his love for his firstborn, it must be acknowledged that he is so physically in the manifestation of his fondness.

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It is only tremblingly, and with contortions and efforts, that he lifts the slight burden. He is afraid of smashing the youngster, who knows this, and thence bawls with all the force of his lungs. He expands more strength, poor man, in lifting up his child than he would in bursting a door open. If he kisses him, his beard pricks him; if he touches him, his big fingers cause him some disaster. He has the air of a bear threading a needle.

And yet it must be won, the affection of this poor father, who, at the outset, meets nothing but misadventures; he must be captivated, captured, made to have a taste for the business, and not be left too long to play the part of a recruit.

Nature has provided for it, and the father rises to the rank of corporal the day the baby lisps his first syllables.

It is very sweet, the first lisping utterance of a child, and admirably chosen to move the "pa-pa" the little creature first murmurs. It is strange that the first word of a child should express precisely the deepest and tenderest sentiment of all?

Is it not touching to see that the little creature finds of himself the word that is sure to touch him of whom he stands most in need; the word that means, "I am yours, love me, give me a place in your heart, open your arms to me; you see I do not know much as yet, I have only just arrived, but, already, I think of you, I am one of the family, I shall eat at your table, and bear your name, pa-pa, pa-pa."

He has discovered at once the most delicate of flatteries, the sweetest of caresses. He enters on life by a master stroke.

Ah! the dear little love! "Pa-pa, pa-pa," I still hear his faint, hesitating voice, I can still see his two coral lips open and close. We were all in a circle around him, kneeling down to be on a level with him. They kept saying to him, "Say it again, dear, say it again. Where is papa?" And he, amused by all these people about him, stretched out his arms, and turned his eyes toward me.

I kissed him heartily, and felt that two big tears hindered me from speaking.

From that moment I was a papa in earnest. I was christened.

CHAPTER XXVIII. BABIES AND PAPAS

When the baby reaches three or four years of age, when his sex shows itself in his actions, his tastes and his eyes, when he smashes his wooden horses, cuts open his drums, blows trumpets, breaks the castors off the furniture, and evinces a decided hostility to crockery; in a word, when he is a man, it is then that the affection of a father for his son becomes love. He feels himself invaded by a need of a special fondness, of which the sweetest recollections of his past life can give no idea. A deep sentiment envelopes his heart, the countless roots of which sink into it in all directions. Defects or qualities penetrate and feed on this sentiment. Thus, we find in paternal love all the weaknesses and all the greatnesses of humanity. Vanity, abnegation, pride, and disinterestedness are united together, and man in his entirety appears in the papa.

It is on the day which the child becomes a mirror in which you recognize your features, that the heart is moved and awakens. Existence becomes duplicated, you are no longer one, but one and a half; you feel your importance increase, and, in the future of the little creature who belongs to you, you reconstruct your own past; you resuscitate, and are born again in him. You say to yourself: "I will spare him such and such a vexation which I had to suffer, I will clear from his path such and such a stone over which I stumbled, I will make him happy, and he shall owe all to me; he shall be, thanks to me, full of talents and attractions." You give him, in advance, all that you did not get yourself, and in his future arrange laurels for a little crown for your own brows.

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Human weakness, no doubt; but what matter, provided the sentiment that gives birth to this weakness is the strongest and purest of all? What matter if a limpid stream springs up between two paving stones? Are we to be blamed for being generous out of egotism, and for devoting ourselves to others for reasons of personal enjoyment?

Thus, in the father, vanity is the leading string. Say to any father: "Good heavens! how like you he is!" The poor man may hesitate at saying yes, but I defy him not to smile. He will say, "Perhaps . . . Do you think so? . . . Well, perhaps so, side face."

And do not you be mistaken; if he does so, it is that you may reply in astonishment: "Why, the child is your very image."

He is pleased, and that is easily explained; for is not this likeness a visible tie between him and his work? Is it not his signature, his trade-mark, his title-deed, and, as it were, the sanction of his rights?

To this physical resemblance there soon succeeds a moral likeness, charming in quite another way. You are moved to tears when you recognize the first efforts of this little intelligence to grasp your ideas. Without check or examination it accepts and feeds on them. By degrees the child shares your tastes, your habits, your ways. He assumes a deep voice to be like papa, asks for your braces, sighs before your boots, and sits down with admiration on your hat. He protects his mamma when he goes out with her, and scolds the dog, although he is very much afraid of him; all to be like papa. Have you caught him at meals with his large observant eyes fixed on you, studying your face with open mouth and spoon in hand, and imitating his model with an expression of astonishment and respect. Listen to his long gossips, wandering as his little brain; does he not say:

"When I am big like papa I shall have a moustache and a stick like him, and I shall not be afraid in the dark, because it is silly to be afraid in the dark when you are big, and I shall say 'damn it,' for I shall then be grown up."

"Baby, what did you say, sir?"

"I said just as papa does."

What would you? He is a faithful mirror. You are for him an ideal, a model, the type of all that is great and strong, handsome and intelligent.

Often he makes mistakes, the little dear, but his error is all the more delicious in its sincerity, and you feel all the more unworthy of such frank admiration. You console yourself for your own imperfections in reflecting that he is not conscious of them.

The defects of children are almost always harrowed from their father; they are the consequences of a too literal copy. Provide, then, against them. Yes, no doubt, but I ask you what strength of mind is not needed by a poor man to undeceive his baby, to destroy, with a word, his innocent confidence, by saying to him: "My child, I am not perfect, and I have faults to be avoided?"

This species of devotion on the part of the baby for his father reminds me of the charming remark of one of my little friends. Crossing the road, the little fellow caught sight of a policeman. He examined him with respect, and then turning to me, after a moment's reflection, said, with an air of conviction: "Papa is stronger than all the policemen, isn't he?"

If I had answered "No," our intimacy would have been broken off short.

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Was it not charming? One can truly say, "Like baby, like papa." Our life is the threshold of his. It is with our eyes that he has first seen.

Profit, young fathers, by the first moments of candor on the part of your dear baby, seek to enter his heart when this little heart opens, and establish yourself in it so thoroughly, that at the moment when the child is able to judge you, he will love you too well to be severe or to cease loving. Win his, affection, it is worth the trouble.

To be loved all your life by a being you love that is the problem to be solved, and toward the solution of which all your efforts should be directed. To make yourself loved, is to store up treasures of happiness for the winter. Each year will take away a scrap of your life, contract the circle of interests and pleasures in which you live; your mind by degrees will lose its vigor, and ask for rest, and as you live less and less by the mind, you will live more and more by the heart. The affection of others which was only a pleasant whet will become a necessary food, and whatever you may have been, statesmen or artists, soldiers or bankers, when your heads are white, you will no longer be anything but fathers.

But filial love is not born all at once, nor is it necessary it should be. The voice of nature is a voice rather poetical than truthful. The affection of children is earned and deserved; it is a consequence, not a cause, and gratitude is its commencement. At any cost, therefore, your baby must be made grateful. Do not reckon that he will be grateful to you for your solicitude, your dreams for his future, the cost of his nursing, and the splendid dowry that you are amassing for him; such gratitude would require from his little brain too complicated a calculation, besides social ideas as yet unknown to him. He will not be thankful to you for the extreme fondness you have for him; do not be astonished at it, and do not cry out at his ingratitude. You must first make him understand your affection; he must appreciate and judge it before responding to it; he must know his notes before he can play tunes.

The little man's gratitude will at first be nothing but a simple, egotistical and natural calculation. If you have made him laugh, if you have amused him, he will want you to begin again, he will hold out his little arms to you, crying: "Do it again." And the recollection of the pleasure you have given him becoming impressed upon his mind, he will soon say to himself: "No one amuses me so well as papa; it is he who tosses me into the air, plays at hide-and-seek with me and tells me tales." So, by degrees, gratitude will be born in him, as thanks spring to the lips of him who is made happy.

Therefore, learn the art of amusing your child, imitate the crowing of the cock, and gambol on the carpet, answer his thousand impossible questions, which are the echo of his endless dreams, and let yourself be pulled by the beard to imitate a horse. All this is kindness, but also cleverness, and good King Henry IV did not belie his skilful policy by walking on all fours on his carpet with his children on his back.

In this way, no doubt, your paternal authority will lose something of its austere prestige, but will gain the deep and lasting influence that affection gives. Your baby will fear you less but will love you more. Where is the harm.

Do not be afraid of anything; become his comrade, in order to have the right of remaining his friend. Hide your paternal superiority as the commissary of police does his sash. Ask with kindness for that which you might rightly insist upon having, and await everything from his heart if you have known how to touch it. Carefully avoid such ugly words as discipline, passive obedience and command; let his submission be gentle to him, and his obedience resemble kindness. Renounce the stupid pleasure of imposing your fancies upon him, and of giving orders to prove your infallibility.

Children have a keenness of judgment, and a delicacy of impression which would not be imagined, unless one has studied them. Justice and equity are easily born in their minds, for they possess, above all things, positive logic. Profit by all this. There are unjust and harsh words which remain graven on a child's heart, and which he remembers all his life. Reflect that, in your baby, there is a man whose affection will cheer your old age; therefore respect him so that he may respect you; and be sure that there is not a single seed sown in this little heart which

will not sooner or later bear fruit.

But there are, you will say, unmanageable children, rebels from the cradle. Are you sure that the first word they heard in their lives has not been the cause of their evil propensities? Where there has been rebellion, there has been clumsy pressure; for I will not believe in natural vice. Among evil instincts there is always a good one, of which an arm can be made to combat the others. This requires, I know, extreme kindness, perfect tact, and unlimited confidence, but the reward is sweet. I think, therefore, in conclusion, that a father's first kiss, his first look, his first caresses, have an immense influence on a child's life. To love is a great deal. To know how to love is everything.

Even were one not a father, it is impossible to pass by the dear little ones without feeling touched, and without loving them. Muddy and ragged, or carefully decked out; running in the roadway and rolling in the dust, or playing at skipping rope in the gardens of the Tuileries; dabbling among the ducklings, or building hills of sand beside well-dressed mamma's babies are charming. In both classes there is the same grace, the same unembarrassed movements, the same comical seriousness, the same carelessness as to the effect created, in short, the same charm; the charm that is called childhood, which one can not understand without loving which one finds just the same throughout nature, from the opening flower and the dawning day to the child entering upon life.

A baby is not an imperfect being, an unfinished sketch he is a man. Watch him closely, follow every one of his movements; they will reveal to you a logical sequence of ideas, a marvellous power of imagination, such as will not again be found at any period of life. There is more real poetry in the brain of these dear loves than in twenty epics. They are surprised and unskilled, no doubt; but nothing equals the vigor of these minds, unexperienced, fresh, simple, sensible of the slightest impressions, which make their way through the midst of the unknown.

What immense labor is gone through by them in a few months! To notice noises, classify them, understand that some of these sounds are words, and that these words are thoughts; to find out of themselves alone the meaning of everything, and distinguish the true from the false, the real from the imaginary; to correct, by observation, the errors of their too ardent imagination; to unravel a chaos, and during this gigantic task to render the tongue supple and strengthen the staggering little legs, in short, to become a man. If ever there was a curious and touching sight it is that of this little creature setting out upon the conquest of the world. As yet he knows neither doubt nor fear, and opens his heart fully. There is something of Don Quixote about a baby. He is as comic as the Knight, but he has also a sublime side.

Do not laugh too much at the hesitations, the countless gropings, the preposterous follies of this virgin mind, which a butterfly lifts to the clouds, to which grains of sand are mountains, which understands the twittering of birds, ascribes thoughts to flowers, and souls to dolls, which believes in far-off realms, where the trees are sugar, the fields chocolate, and the rivers syrup, for which Punch and Mother Hubbard are real and powerful individuals, a mind which peoples silence and vivifies night. Do not laugh at his love; his life is a dream, and his mistakes poetry.

This touching poetry which you find in the infancy of man you also find in the infancy of nations. It is the same. In both cases there is the same necessity of idealization, the same tendency to personify the unknown. And it may be said that between Punch and Jupiter, Mother Hubbard and Venus, there is only a hair's breadth.

CHAPTER XXIX. HIS FIRST BREECHES

The great desire in a child is to become a man. But the first symptom of virility, the first serious step taken in life, is marked by the assumption of breeches.

This first breeching is an event that papa desires and mamma dreads. It seems to the mother that it is the beginning of her being forsaken. She looks with tearful eyes at the petticoat laid aside for ever, and murmurs to herself, "Infancy is over then? My part will soon become a small one. He will have fresh tastes, new wishes; he is no longer only myself, his personality is asserting itself; he is some one's boy."

The father, on the contrary, is delighted. He laughs in his moustache to see the little arching calves peeping out beneath the trousers; he feels the little body, the outline of which can be clearly made out under the new garment, and says to himself; "How well he is put together, the rascal. He will have broad shoulders and strong loins like myself. How firmly his little feet tread the ground." Papa would like to see him in jackboots; for a trifle he would buy him spurs. He begins to see himself in this little one sprung from him; he looks at him in a fresh light, and, for the first time, he finds a great charm in calling him "my boy."

As to the baby, he is intoxicated, proud, triumphant, although somewhat embarrassed as to his arms and legs, and, be it said, without any wish to offend him, greatly resembling those little poodles we see freshly shaven on the approach of summer. What greatly disturbed the poor little fellow is past. How many men of position are there who do not experience similar inconvenience. He knows very well that breeches, like nobility, render certain things incumbent on their possessor, that he must now assume new ways, new gestures, a new tone of voice; he begins to scan out of the corner of his eye the movements of his papa, who is by no means ill pleased at this: he clumsily essays a masculine gesture or two; and this struggle between his past and his present gives him for some time the most comical air in the world. His petticoats haunt him, and really he is angry that it is so.

Dear first pair of breeches! I love you, because you are a faithful friend, and I encounter at every step in life you and your train of sweet sensations. Are you not the living image of the latest illusion caressed by our vanity? You, young officer, who still measure your moustaches in the glass, and who have just assumed for the first time the epaulette and the gold belt, how did you feel when you went downstairs and heard the scabbard of your sabre go clink-clank on the steps, when with your cap on one side and your arm akimbo you found yourself in the street, and, an irresistible impulse urging you on, you gazed at your figure reflected in the chemist's bottles? Will you dare to say that you did not halt before those bottles? First pair of breeches, lieutenant.

You will find them again, these breeches, when you are promoted to be Captain and are decorated. And later on, when, an old veteran with a gray moustache, you take a fair companion to rejuvenate you, you will again put them on; but this time the dear creature will help you to wear them.

And the day when you will no longer have anything more to do with them, alas! that day you will be very low, for one's whole life is wrapped up in this precious garment. Existence is nothing more than putting on our first pair of breeches, taking them off, putting them on again, and dying with eyes fixed on them.

Is it the truth that most of our joys have no more serious origin than those of children? Are we then so simple? Ah! yes, my dear sir, we are simple to this degree, that we do not think we are. We never quite get rid of our swaddling clothes; do you see, there is always a little bit sticking out? There is a baby in every one of us, or, rather, we are only babies grown big.

See the young barrister walking up and down the lobby of the courts. He is freshly shaven: in the folds of his new gown he hides a pile of documents, and on his head, in which a world of thought is stirring, is a fine advocate's coif, which he bought yesterday, and which this morning he coquettishly crushed in with a blow from his fist before putting it on. This young fellow is happy; amid the general din he can distinguish the echo of his own footsteps, and the ring of his bootheels sounds to him like the great bell of Notre Dame. In a few minutes he will find an excuse for descending the great staircase, and crossing the courtyard in costume. You may be sure that he will not disrobe except to go to dinner. What joy in these five yards of black stuff; what happiness in this ugly bit of cloth stretched over stiff cardboard!

First pair of breeches I think I recognize you.

And you, Madame, with what happiness do you renew each season the enjoyment caused by new clothes? Do not say, I beg of you, that such enjoyments are secondary ones, for their influence is positive upon your nature and your character. Why, I ask you, did you find so much captivating logic, so much persuasive eloquence, in the sermon of Father Paul? Why did you weep on quitting the church, and embrace your husband as soon as you got home? You know better than I do, Madame, that it was because on that day you had put on for the first time that little yellow bonnet, which is a gem, I acknowledge, and which makes you look twice as pretty. These impressions can scarcely be explained, but they are invincible. There may be a trifle of childishness in it all, you will admit, but it is a childishness that can not be got rid of.

As a proof of it, the other day, going to St. Thomas's to hear Father Nicholas, who is one of our shining lights, you experienced totally different sentiments; a general feeling of discontent and doubt and nervous irritability at every sentence of the preacher. Your soul did not soar heavenward with the same unreserved confidence; you left St. Thomas's with your head hot and your feet cold; and you so far forgot yourself as to say, as you got into your carriage, that Father Nicholas was a Gallican devoid of eloquence. Your coachman heard it. And, finally, on reaching home you thought your drawing-room too small and your husband growing too fat. Why, I again ask you, this string of vexatious impressions? If you remember rightly, dear Madame, you wore for the first time the day before yesterday that horrible little violet bonnet, which is such a disgusting failure. First pair of breeches, dear Madame.

Would you like a final example? Observe your husband. Yesterday he went out in a bad temper he had breakfasted badly and lo! in the evening, at a quarter to seven, he came home from the Chamber joyful and well-pleased, a smile on his lips, and good-humor in his eye. He kissed you on the forehead with a certain unconstraint, threw a number of pamphlets and papers with an easy gesture on the sidetable, sat down to table, found the soup delicious, and ate joyously. "What is the matter with my husband?" you asked yourself . . . I will explain. Your husband spoke yesterday for the first time in the building, you know. He said the sitting was a noisy one, the Left were threshing out some infernal questions he said, during the height of the uproar, and rapping with his paper-knife on his desk: "But we can not hear!" And as these words were received on all sides with universal approbation and cries of "Hear, hear!" he gave his thoughts a more parliamentary expression by adding: "The voice of the honorable gentleman who is speaking does not reach us." It was not much certainly, and the amendment may have been carried all the same, but after all it was a step; a triumph, to tell the truth, since your husband has from day to day put off the delivery of his maiden speech. Behold a happy deputy, a deputy who has just put on his first pair of breeches.

What matter whether the reason be a serious or a futile one, if your blood flows faster, if you feel happier, if you are proud of yourself? To win a great victory or put on a new bonnet, what matters it if this new bonnet gives you the same joy as a laurel crown?

Therefore do not laugh too much at baby if his first pair of breeches intoxicates him, if, when he wears them, he thinks his shadow longer and the trees less high. He is beginning his career as a man, dear child, nothing more.

How many things have not people been proud of since the beginning of the world? They were proud of their noses under Francis the First, of their perukes under Louis XIV, and later on of their appetites and stoutness. A man is proud of his wife, his idleness, his wit, his stupidity, the beard on his chin, the cravat round his neck, the hump on his back.

CHAPTER XXX. COUNTRY CHILDREN

I love the baby that runs about under the trees of the Tuileries; I love the pretty little fair-haired girls with nice

white stockings and unmanageable crinolines. I like to watch the tiny damsels decked out like reliquaries, and already affecting coquettish and lackadaisical ways. It seems to me that in each of them I can see thousands of charming faults already peeping forth. But all these miniature men and women, exchanging postage stamps and chattering of dress, have something of the effect of adorable monstrosities on me.

I like them as I like a bunch of grapes in February, or a dish of green peas in December.

In the babies' kingdom, my friend, my favorite is the country baby, running about in the dust on the highway barefoot and ragged, and searching for black birds' and chaffinches' nests on the outskirts of the woods. I love his great black wondering eye, which watches you fixedly from between two locks of uncombed hair, his firm flesh bronzed by the sun, his swarthy forehead, hidden by his hair, his smudged face and his picturesque breeches kept from falling off by the paternal braces fastened to a metal button, the gift of a gendarme.

Ah! what fine breeches; not very long in the legs, but, then, what room everywhere else! He could hide away entirely in this immense space which allows a shirt-tail, escaping through a slit, to wave like a flag. These breeches preserve a remembrance of all the garments of the family; here is a piece of maternal petticoat, here a fragment of yellow waistcoat, here a scrap of blue handkerchief; the whole sewn with a thread that presents the twofold advantage of being seen from a distance, and of not breaking.

But under these patched clothes you can make out a sturdy little figure; and, besides, what matters the clothes? Country babies are not coquettish; and when the coach comes down the hill with jingling bells and they rush after it, stumbling over their neighbors, tumbling with them in the dust, and rolling into the ditches, what would all these dear little gamins do in silk stockings?

I love them thus because they are wild, taking alarm, and fleeing away at your approach like the young rabbits you surprise in the morning playing among the wild thyme. You must have recourse to a thousand subterfuges in order to triumph over their alarm and gain their confidence. But if at length, thanks to your prudence, you find yourself in their company, at the outset play ceases, shouts and noise die away; the little group remain motionless, scratching their heads, and all their uneasy eyes look fixedly at you. This is the difficult moment.

A sharp word, a stern gesture, may cause an eternal misunderstanding with them, just as a kind remark, a smile, a caress will soon accomplish their conquest. And this conquest is worth the trouble, believe me.

One of my chief methods of winning them was as follows: I used to take my watch out of my pocket and look at it attentively. Then I would see my little people stretch their necks, open their eyes, and come a step nearer; and it would often happen that the chickens, ducklings, and geese, which were loitering close by in the grass, imitated their comrades and drew near too. I then would put my watch to my ear and smile like a man having a secret whispered to him. In presence of this prodigy my youngsters could no longer restrain themselves, and would exchange among themselves those keen, simple, timid, mocking looks, which must have been seen to be understood. They advanced this time in earnest, and if I offered to let the boldest listen, by holding out my watch to him, he would draw back alarmed, although smiling, while the band would break into an outburst of joy; the ducklings flapping their wings, the white geese cackling, and the chickens going *chk, chk*. The game was won.

How many times have I not played this little farce, seated under a willow on the banks of my little stream, which ripples over the white stones, while the reeds bend tremblingly. The children would crowd round me to hear the watch, and soon questions broke forth in chorus to an accompaniment of laughter. They inspected my gaiters, rummaged in my pockets and leant against my knees. The ducklings glided under my feet, and the big geese tickled my back.

How enjoyable it is not to alarm creatures that tremble at everything. I would not move for fear of interrupting their joy, and was like a child who is building a house of cards and who has got to the third story. But I marked all

these happy little faces standing out against the blue sky; I watched the rays of the sun stealing into the tangles of their fair hair, or spreading in a patch of gold on their little brown necks; I followed their gestures full of awkwardness and grace; I sat down on the grass to be the nearer to them; and if an unfortunate chicken came to grief, between two daisies, I quickly stretched out my arm and replaced it on its legs.

I assure you that they were all grateful. If one loves these little people at all, there is one thing that strikes you when you watch them closely. Ducklings dabbling along the edge of the water or turning head over heels in their feeding trough, young shoots thrusting forth their tender little leaves above ground, little chickens running along before their mother hen, or little men staggering among the grass—all these little creatures resemble one another. They are the babies of the great mother Nature; they have common laws, a common physiognomy; they have something inexplicable about them which is at once comic and graceful, awkward and tender, and which makes them loved at once; they are relations, friends, comrades, under the same flag. This pink and white flag, let us salute it as it passes, old graybeards that we are. It is blessed, and is called childhood.

All babies are round, yielding, weak, timid, and soft to the touch as a handful of wadding. Protected by cushions of good rosy flesh or by a coating of soft down, they go rolling, staggering, dragging along their little unaccustomed feet, shaking in the air their plump hands or featherless wing. See them stretched haphazard in the sun without distinction of species, swelling themselves with milk or meal, and dare to say that they are not alike. Who knows whether all these children of nature have not a common point of departure, if they are not brothers of the same origin?

Since men with green spectacles have existed, they have amused themselves with ticketing the creatures of this world. These latter are arranged, divided into categories and classified, as though by a careful apothecary who wants everything about him in order. It is no slight matter to stow away each one in the drawer that suits him, and I have heard that certain subjects still remain on the counter owing to their belonging to two show-cases at once.

And what proves to me, indeed, that these cases exist? What is there to assure me that the whole world is not one family, the members of which only differ by trifles which we are pleased to regard as everything?

Have you fully established the fact of these drawers and compartments? Have you seen the bars of these imaginary cages in which you imprison kingdoms and species? Are there not infinite varieties which escape your analysis, and are, as it were, the unknown links uniting all the particles of the animated world? Why say, "For these eternity, for those annihilation?"

Why say, "This is the slave, that is the sovereign?" Strange boldness for men who are ignorant of almost everything!

Man, animal or plant, the creature vibrates, suffers or enjoys exists and encloses in itself the trace of the same mystery. What assures me that this mystery, which is everywhere the same, is not the sign of a similar relationship, is not the sign of a great law of which we are ignorant?

I am dreaming, you will say. And what does science do herself when she reaches that supreme point at which magnifying glasses become obscure and compasses powerless? It dreams, too; it supposes. Let us, too, suppose that the tree is a man, rough skinned dreamy and silent, who loves, too, after his fashion and vibrates to his very roots when some evening a warm breeze, laden with the scents of the plain, blows through his green locks and overwhelms him with kisses. No, I do not accept the hypothesis of a world made for us. Childish pride, which would be ridiculous did not its very simplicity lend it something poetic, alone inspires it. Man is but one of the links of an immense chain, of the two ends of which we are ignorant. [See Mark Twain's essay: 'What is Man.' D.W.]

Is it not consoling to fancy that we are not an isolated power to which the remainder of the world serves as a pedestal, that one is not a licensed destroyer, a poor, fragile tyrant, whom arbitrary decrees protect, but a necessary note of an infinite harmony? To fancy that the law of life is the same in the immensity of space and irradiates worlds as it irradiates cities and as it irradiates ant-hills. To fancy that each vibration in ourselves is the echo of another vibration. To fancy a sole principle, a primordial axiom, to think the universe envelops us as a mother clasps her child in her two arms; and say to one's self, "I belong to it and it to me; it would cease to be without me. I should not exist without it." To see, in short, only the divine unity of laws, which could not be nonexistent, where others have only seen a ruling fancy or an individual caprice.

It is a dream. Perhaps so, but I have often dreamed it when watching the village children rolling on the fresh grass among the ducklings.

CHAPTER XXXI. AUTUMN

Do you know the autumn, dear reader, autumn away in the country with its squalls, its long gusts, its yellow leaves whirling in the distance, its sodden paths, its fine sunsets, pale as an invalid's smile, its pools of water in the roadway; do you know all these? If you have seen all these they are certainly not indifferent to you. One either detests or else loves them.

I am of the number of those who love them, and I would give two summers for a single autumn. I adore the big blazing fires; I like to take refuge in the chimney corner with my dog between my wet gaiters. I like to watch the tall flames licking the old ironwork and lighting up the black depths. You hear the wind whistling in the stable, the great door creak, the dog pull at his chain and howl, and, despite the noise of the forest trees which are groaning and bending close by, you can make out the lugubrious cawings of a flock of rooks struggling against the storm. The rain beats against the little panes; and, stretching your legs toward the fire, you think of those without. You think of the sailors, of the old doctor driving his little cabriolet, the hood of which sways to and fro as the wheels sink into the ruts, and Cocotte neighs in the teeth of the wind. You think of the two gendarmes, with the rain streaming from their cocked hats; you see them, chilled and soaked, making their way along the path among the vineyards, bent almost double in the saddle, their horses almost covered with their long blue cloaks. You think of the belated sportsman hastening across the heath, pursued by the wind like a criminal by justice, and whistling to his dog, poor beast, who is splashing through the marshland. Unfortunate doctor, unfortunate gendarmes, unfortunate sportsman!

And all at once the door opens and Baby rushes in exclaiming: "Papa, dinner is ready." Poor doctor! poor gendarmes!

"What is there for dinner?"

The cloth was as white as snow in December, the plate glittered in the lamplight, the steam from the soup rose up under the lamp-shade, veiling the flame and spreading an appetizing smell of cabbage. Poor doctor! poor gendarmes!

The doors were well closed, the curtains carefully drawn. Baby hoisted himself on to his tall chair and stretched out his neck for his napkin to be tied round it, exclaiming at the same time with his hands in the air: "Nice cabbage soup." And, smiling to myself, I said: "The youngster has all my tastes."

Mamma soon came, and cheerfully pulling off her tight gloves: "There, sir, I think, is something that you are very fond of," she said to me.

It was a pheasant day, and instinctively I turned round a little to catch a glimpse on the sideboard of a dusty bottle

of my old Chambertin. Pheasant and Chambertin! Providence created them for one another and my wife has never separated them.

"Ah! my children, how comfortable you are here," said I, and every one burst out laughing. Poor gendarmes! poor doctor!

Yes, yes, I am very fond of the autumn, and my darling boy liked it as well as I did, not only on account of the pleasure there is in gathering round a fine large fire, but also on account of the squalls themselves, the wind and the dead leaves. There is a charm in braving them. How many times we have both gone out for a walk through the country despite cold and threatening clouds. We were wrapped up and shod with thick boots; I took his hand and we started off at haphazard. He was five years old then and trotted along like a little man. Heavens! it is five-and-twenty years ago. We went up the narrow lane strewn with damp black leaves; the tall gray poplars stripped of their foliage allowed a view of the horizon, and we could see in the distance, under a violet sky streaked with cold and yellowish bands, the low thatched roofs and the red chimneys from which issued little bluish clouds blown away by the wind. Baby jumped for joy, holding with his hand his hat which threatened to fly off, and looking at me with eyes glittering through tears brought into them by the breeze. His cheeks were red with cold, and quite at the tip of his nose hung ready to drop a small transparent pearl. But he was happy, and we skirted the wet meadows overflowed by the swollen river. No more reeds, no more water lilies, no more flowers on the banks. Some cows, up to mid-leg in damp herbage, were grazing quietly.

At the bottom of a ditch, near a big willow trunk, two little girls were huddled together under a big cloak wrapped about them. They were watching their cows, their half bare feet in split wooden shoes and their two little chilled faces under the large hood. From time to time large puddles of water in which the pale sky was reflected barred the way, and we remained for a moment beside these miniature lakes, rippling beneath the north wind, to see the leaves float on them. They were the last. We watched them detach themselves from the tops of the tall trees, whirl through the air and settle in the puddles. I took my little boy in my arms and we went through them as we could. At the boundaries of the brown and stubble fields was an overturned plough or an abandoned harrow. The stripped vines were level with the ground, and their damp and knotty stakes were gathered in large piles.

I remember that one day in one of these autumnal walks, as we gained the top of the hill by a broken road which skirts the heath and leads to the old bridge, the wind suddenly began to blow furiously. My darling, overwhelmed by it, caught hold of my leg and sheltered himself in the skirt of my coat. My dog, for his part, stiffening his four legs, with his tail between the hind ones and his ears waving in the wind, looked up at me too. I turned, the horizon was as gloomy as the interior of a church. Huge black clouds were sweeping toward us, and the trees were bending and groaning on every side under the torrents of rain driven before the squall. I only had time to catch up my little man, who was crying with fright, and to run and squeeze myself against a hedge which was somewhat protected by the old willows. I opened my umbrella, crouched down behind it, and, unbuttoning my big coat, stuffed Baby inside. He clung closely to me. My dog placed himself between my legs, and Baby, thus sheltered by his two friends, began to smile from the depths of his hiding-place. I looked at him and said:

"Well, little man, are you all right?"

"Yes, dear papa."

I felt his two arms clasp round my waist I was much thinner than I am now and I saw that he was grateful to me for acting as a roof to him. Through the opening he stretched out his little lips and I bent mine down.

"Is it still raining outside, papa?"

"It will soon be over."

"Already, I am so comfortable inside you."

How all this stays in your heart. It is perhaps silly to relate these little joys, but how sweet it is to recall them.

We reached home as muddy as two water-dogs and we were well scolded. But when evening had come and Baby was in bed and I went to kiss him and tickle him a little, as was our custom, he put his two little arms round my neck and whispered: "When it rains we will go again, eh?"

CHAPTER XXXII. HE WOULD HAVE BEEN FORTY NOW

When you have seen your child born, have watched his first steps in life, have noted him smile and weep, have heard him call you papa as he stretches out his little arms to you, you think that you have become acquainted with all the joys of paternity, and, as though satiated with these daily joys that are under your hand, you already begin to picture those of the morrow. You rush ahead, and explore the future; you are impatient, and gulp down present happiness in long draughts, instead of tasting it drop by drop. But Baby's illness suffices to restore you to reason.

To realize the strength of the ties that bind you to him, it is necessary to have feared to see them broken; to know that a river is deep, you must have been on the point of drowning in it.

Recall the morning when, on drawing aside the curtain of his bed, you saw on the pillow his little face, pale and thin. His sunken eyes, surrounded by a bluish circle, were half closed. You met his glance, which seemed to come through a veil; he saw you, without smiling at you. You said, "Good morning," and he did not answer. His face only expressed dejection and weakness, it was no longer that of your child. He gave a kind of sigh, and his heavy eyelids drooped. You took his hands, elongated, transparent, and with colorless nails; they were warm and moist. You kissed them, those poor little hands, but there was no responsive thrill to the contact of your lips. Then you turned round, and saw your wife weeping behind you. It was at that moment when you felt yourself shudder from head to foot, and that the idea of a possible woe seized on you, never more to leave you. Every moment you kept going back to the bed and raising the curtains again, hoping perhaps that you had not seen aright, or that a miracle had taken place; but you withdrew quickly, with a lump in your throat. And yet you strove to smile, to make him smile himself; you sought to arouse in him the wish for something, but in vain; he remained motionless, exhausted, not even turning round, indifferent to all you said, to everything, even yourself.

And what is all that is needed to strike down this little creature, to reduce him to this pitch? Only a few hours. What, is that all that is needed to put an end to him? Five minutes. Perhaps.

You know that life hangs on a thread in this frail body, so little fitted to suffer. You feel that life is only a breath, and say to yourself: "Suppose this one is his last." A little while back he was complaining. Already he does so no longer. It seems as though someone is clasping him, bearing him away, tearing him from your arms. Then you draw near him, and clasp him to you almost involuntarily, as though to give him back some of your own life. His bed is damp with fever sweats, his lips are losing their color. The nostrils of his little nose, grown sharp and dry, rise and fall. His mouth remains wide open. It is that little rosy mouth which used to laugh so joyfully, those are the two lips that used to press themselves to yours, and . . . all the joys, the bursts of laughter, the follies, the endless chatter, all the bygone happiness, flock to your recollection at the sound of that gasping, breathing, while big hot tears fall slowly from your eyes. Poor wee man. Your hand seeks his little legs, and you dare not touch his chest, which you have kissed so often, for fear of encountering that ghastly leanness which you foresee, but the contact of which would make you break out in sobs. And then, at a certain moment, while the sunlight was flooding the room, you heard a deeper moan, resembling a cry. You darted forward; his face was contracted, and he looked toward you with eyes that no longer saw. And then all was calm, silent and motionless, while his hollow cheeks became yellow and transparent as the amber of his necklaces.

The recollection of that moment lasts for a lifetime in the hearts of those who have loved; and even in old age, when time has softened your grief, when other joys and other sorrows have filled your days, his dying bed still appears to you when sitting of an evening beside the fire. You see amid the sparkling flames the room of the lost child, the table with the drinks, the bottles, the arsenal of illness, the little garments, carefully folded, that waited for him so long, his toys abandoned in a corner. You even see the marks of his little fingers on the wall paper, and the zigzags he made with his pencil on the door; you see the corner scribbled over with lines and dates, in which he was measured every month, you see him playing, running, rushing up in a perspiration to throw himself into your arms, and, at the same time, you also see him fixing his glazing eyes on you, or motionless and cold under a white sheet, wet with holy water.

Does not this recollection recur to you sometimes, Grandma, and do not you still shed a big tear as you say to yourself: "He would have been forty now?" Do we not know, dear old lady, whose heart still bleeds, that at the bottom of your wardrobe, behind your jewels, beside packets of yellow letters, the handwriting of which we will not guess at, there is a little museum of sacred relics the last shoes in which he played about on the gravel the day he complained of being cold, the remains of some broken toys, a dried sprig of box, a little cap, his last, in a triple wrapper, and a thousand trifles that are a world to you, poor woman, that are the fragments of your broken heart?

The ties that unite children to parents are unloosed. Those which unite parents to children are broken. In one case, it is the past that is wiped out; in the other, the future that is rent away.

CHAPTER XXXIII. CONVALESCENCE

But, my patient reader, forget what have just said. Baby does not want to leave you, he does not want to die, poor little thing, and if you want a proof of it, watch him very closely; there, he smiles.

A very faint smile like those rays of sunlight that steal between two clouds at the close of a wet winter. You rather guess at than see this smile, but it is enough to warm your heart. The cloud begins to disperse, he sees you, he hears you, he knows that papa is there, your child is restored to you. His glance is already clearer. Call him softly. He wants to turn, but he can not yet, and for his sole answer his little hand, which is beginning to come to life again, moves and crumples the sheet. Just wait a little, poor impatient father, and tomorrow, on his awakening, he will say "Papa." You will see what good it will do you, this "Papa," faint as a mere breath, this first scarcely intelligible sign of a return to life. It will seem to you that your child has been born again a second time.

He will still suffer, he will have further crises, the storm does not become a calm all at once, but he will be able now to rest his head on your shoulder, nestle in your arms among the blankets; he will be able to complain, to ask help and relief of you with eye and voice; you will, in short, be reunited, and you will be conscious that he suffers less by suffering on your knees. You will hold his hand in yours, and if you seek to go away he will look at you and grasp your finger. How many things are expressed in this grasp. Dear sir, have you experienced it?

"Papa, do stay with me, you help to make me better; when I am alone I am afraid of the pain. Hold me tightly to you, and I shall not suffer so much."

The more your protection is necessary to another the more you enjoy granting it. What is it then when this other is a second self, dearer than the first. With convalescence comes another childhood, so to speak. Fresh astonishments, fresh joys, fresh desires come one by one as health is restored. But what is most touching and delightful, is that delicate coaxing by the child who still suffers and clings to you, that abandonment of himself to you, that extreme weakness that gives him wholly over to you. At no period of his life has he so enjoyed your presence, has he taken refuge so willingly in your dressing-gown, has he listened more attentively to your stories and smiled more intelligently at your merriment. Is it true, as it seems to you, that he has never been more charming? Or is it simply that threatened danger has caused you to set a higher value on his caresses, and that you

count over your treasures with all the more delight because you have been all but ruined?

But the little man is up again. Beat drums; sound trumpets; come out of your hiding-places, broken horses; stream in, bright sun; a song from you little birds. The little king comes to life again long live the king! And you, your majesty, come and kiss your father.

What is singular is that this fearful crisis you have gone through becomes in some way sweet to you; you incessantly recur to it, you speak of it, you speak of it and cherish it in your mind; and, like the companions of Aeneas, you seek by the recollection of past dangers to increase the present joy.

"Do you remember," you say, "the day when he was so ill? Do you remember his dim eyes, his poor; thin, little arm, and his pale lips? And that morning the doctor went away after clasping our hands?"

It is only Baby who does not remember anything. He only feels an overpowering wish to restore his strength, fill out his cheeks and recover his calves.

"Papa, are we going to have dinner soon, eh, papa?"

"Yes, it is getting dusk, wait a little."

"But, papa, suppose we don't wait?"

"In twenty minutes, you little glutton."

"Twenty, is twenty a great many? If you eat twenty cutlets would it make you ill? But with potatoes, and jam, and soup, and is it still twenty minutes?"

Then again: "Papa, when there is beef with sauce," he has his mouth full of it, "red tomato sauce."

"Yes, dear, well?"

"Well, a bullock is much bigger than what is on the dish; why don't they bring the rest of the bullock? I could eat it all and then some bread and then some haricots, and then "

He is insatiable when he has his napkin under his chin, and it is a happiness to see the pleasure he feels in working his jaws. His little eyes glisten, his cheeks grow red; what he puts away into his little stomach it is impossible to say, and so busy is he that he has scarcely time to laugh between two mouthfuls. Toward dessert his ardor slackens, his look becomes more and more languid, his fingers relax and his eyes close from time to time.

"Mamma, I should like to go to bed," he says, rubbing his eyes. Baby is coming round.

CHAPTER XXXIV. FAMILY TIES

The exhilaration of success and the fever of life's struggle take a man away from his family, or cause him to live amid it as a stranger, and soon he no longer finds any attractions in the things which charmed him at the outset. But let ill luck come, let the cold wind blow rather strongly, and he falls back upon himself, he seeks near him something to support him in his weakness, a sentiment to replace his vanished dream, and he bends toward his child, he takes his wife's hand and presses it. He seems to invite these two to share his burden. Seeing tears in the eyes of those he loves, his own seem diminished to that extent. It would seem that moral suffering has the same effect as physical pain. The drowning wretch clutches at straws; in the same way, the man whose heart is breaking

clasps his wife and children to him. He asks in turn for help, protection, and comfort, and it is a touching thing to see the strong shelter himself in the arms of the weak and recover courage in their kiss. Children have the instinct of all this; and the liveliest emotion they are capable of feeling is that which they experience on seeing their father weep.

Recall, dear reader, your most remote recollections, seek in that past which seems to you all the clearer the farther you are removed from it. Have you ever seen your father come home and sit down by the fire with a tear in his eye? Then you dared not draw near him at first, so deeply did you feel his grief. How unhappy he must be for his eyes to be wet. Then you felt that a tie attached you to this poor man, that his misfortune struck you too, that a part of it was yours, and that you were smitten because your father was. And no one understands better than the child this joint responsibility of the family to which he owes everything. You have felt all this; your heart has swollen as you stood silent in the corner, and sobs have broken forth as, without knowing why, you have held out your arms toward him. He has turned, he has understood all, he has not been able to restrain his grief any further, and you have remained clasped in one another's arms, father, mother, and child, without saying anything, but gazing at and understanding one another. Did you, however, know the cause of the poor man's grief?

Not at all.

This is why filial love and paternal love have been poetized, why the family is styled holy. It is because one finds therein the very source of that need of loving, helping and sustaining one another, which from time to time spreads over the whole of society, but in the shape of a weakened echo. It is only from time to time in history that we see a whole nation gather together, retire within itself and experience the same thrill.

A frightful convulsion is needed to make a million men hold out their hands to one another and understand one another at a glance; it needs a superhuman effort for the family to become the nation, and for the boundaries of the hearth to extend to the frontiers.

A complaint, a pang, a tear, is enough to make a man, a woman, and a child, blend their hearts together and feel that they are but one.

Laugh at marriage; the task is easy. All human contracts are tainted with error, and an error is always smiled at by those who are not the victims of it. There are husbands, it is certain; and when we see a man tumble down, even if he knocks his brains out, our first impulse is to burst out laughing. Hence the great and eternal mirth that greets Sganarelle.

But search to the bottom and behold that beneath all these trifles, beneath all this dust of little exploded vanities, ridiculous mistakes and comical passions, is hidden the very pivot of society. Verify that in this all is for the best, since this family sentiment, which is the basis of society, is also its consolation and joy.

The honor of our flag, the love of country, and all that urges a man to devote himself to something or some one not himself, are derived from this sentiment, and in it, you may assert, is to be found the source whence flow the great streams at which the human heart quenches its thirst.

Egotism for three, you say. What matter, if this egotism engenders devotion?

Will you reproach the butterfly with having been a caterpillar?

Do not accuse me in all this of exaggeration, or of poetic exaltation.

Yes, family life is very often calm and commonplace, the stock-pot that figures on its escutcheon has not been put there without reason, I admit. To the husband who should come and say to me: "Sir, for two days running I

have fallen asleep by the fireside," I should reply: "You are too lazy, but after all I understand you."

I also understand that Baby's trumpet is noisy, that articles of jewellery are horribly dear, that lace flounces and sable trimmings are equally so, that balls are wearisome, that Madame has her vapors, her follies, exigencies; I understand, in short, that a man whose career is prosperous looks upon his wife and child as two stumbling blocks.

But I am waiting for the happy man, for the moment when his forehead will wrinkle, when disappointment will descend upon his head like a leaden skull-cap, and when picking up the two blocks he has cursed he will make two crutches of them.

I admit that Alexander the Great, Napoleon the First, and all the demi-gods of humanity, have only felt at rare intervals the charm of being fathers and husbands; but we other poor little men, who are less occupied, must be one or the other.

I do not believe in the happy old bachelor; I do not believe in the happiness of all those who, from stupidity or calculation, have withdrawn themselves from the best of social laws. A great deal has been said on this subject, and I do not wish to add to the voluminous documents in this lawsuit. Acknowledge frankly all you who have heard the cry of your new-born child and felt your heart tingle like a glass on the point of breaking, unless you are idiots, acknowledge that you said to yourselves: "I am in the right. Here, and here alone, lies man's part. I am entering on a path, beaten and worn, but straight; I shall cross the weary downs, but each step will bring me nearer the village spire. I am not wandering through life, I am marching on, I stir with my feet the dust in which my father has planted his. My child, on the same road, will find the traces of my footsteps, and, perhaps, on seeing that I have not faltered, will say: 'Let me act like my old father and not lose myself in the ploughed land.'"

If the word holy has still a meaning, despite the uses it has been put to, I do not see that a better use can be made of it than by placing it beside the word family.

They speak of progress, justice, general well-being, infallible policies, patriotism, devotion. I am for all these good things, but this bright horizon is summed up in these three words: "Love your neighbor," and this is precisely, in my opinion, the thing they forget to teach.

To love your neighbor is as simple as possible, but the mischief is that you do not meet with this very natural feeling. There are people who will show you the seed in the hollow of their hand, but even those who deal in this precious grain are the last to show you it in leaf.

Well, my dear reader, this little plant which should spring up like the poppies in the wheat, this plant which has never been seen growing higher than watercress, but which should overtop the oaks, this undiscoverable plant, I know where it grows.

It grows beside the domestic hearth, between the shovel and tongs; it is there that it perpetuates itself, and if it still exists, it is to the family that we owe it. I love pretty nearly all the philanthropists and saviours of mankind; but I only believe in those who have learned to love others by embracing their own children.

Mankind can not be remodelled to satisfy the wants of humanitarian theories; man is egotistical, and he loves, above all, those who are about him. This is the natural human sentiment, and it is this which must be enlarged, extended and cultivated. In a word, it is in family love that is comprised love of country and consequently of humanity. It is from fathers that citizens are made.

Man has not twenty prime movers, but only one in his heart; do not argue but profit by it.

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: Monsieur, Madame and Bebe, v3

Affection is catching. Love between three father, mother, and child when it is strong, soon requires space; it pushes back the walls of the house, and by degrees invites the neighbors. The important thing, then, is to give birth to this love between three; for it is madness, I am afraid, to thrust the whole human species all at once on a man's heart. Such large mouthfuls are not to be swallowed at a gulp, nor without preparation.

This is why I have always thought that with the numerous sous given for the redemption of the little Chinese, we might in France cause the fire to sparkle on hearths where it sparkles no longer, make many eyes grow brighter round a tureen of smoking soup, warm chilled mothers, bring smiles to the pinched faces of children, and give pleasure and happiness to poor discouraged ones on their return home.

What a number of hearty kisses you might have brought about with all these sous, and, in consequence, what a sprinkling with the watering-pot for the little plant you wot of.

"But then what is to become of the redemption of the little Chinese?"

We will think of this later; we must first know how to love our own before we are able to love those of others.

No doubt, this is brutal and egotistical, but you can not alter it; it is out of small faults that you build up great virtues. And, after all, do not grumble, this very vanity is the foundation stone of that great monument at present still propped up by scaffolding which is called Society.