

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy, Zibeline, v1

Phillipe de Masa

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Phillipe de Masa

Translated by D. KNOWLTON RANOUS

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PREFACE

MARQUIS DE MASSA, soldier, composer, and French dramatist, was born in Paris, December 5, 1831. He selected the military career and received a commission in the cavalry after leaving the school of St. Cyr. He served in the Imperial Guards, took part in the Italian and Franco-German Wars and was promoted Chief of Squadron, Fifth Regiment, Chasseurs a Cheval, September 10, 1871. Having tendered his resignation from active service, he was appointed a lieutenant-colonel in the territorial army February 3, 1880. He has been decorated with the Legion of Honor.

The Marquis de Massa is known as a composer of music and as a dramatic author and novelist. At the Opera Comique there was represented in 1861 Royal-Cravate, written by him. Fragments of two operas by him were performed at the Paris Conservatory of Music in 1865, and in 1868. The list of his principal plays follows: 'Le Service en campagne, comedy (1882); La Cicatrice, comedy (1885); Au Mont Ida, Fronsac a La Bastille, and La Coeur de Paris, all in 1887; La Czarine and Brouille depuis Magenta (1888), and La Bonne Aventure all comedies; 889. Together with Petipa he also wrote a ballet Le Roi d'Yvetot (1866); music by Charles Labarre. He further wrote Zibeline, a most brilliant romance (1892) with an Introduction by Jules Claretie; crowned by the Academie Francaise. This odd and dainty little story has a heroine of striking originality, in character and exploits. Her real name is Valentine de Vermont, and she is the daughter of a fabulously wealthy French-American dealer in furs, and when, after his death, she goes to Paris to spend her colossal fortune, and to

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make restitution to the man from whom her father won at play the large sum that became the foundation of his wealth, certain lively Parisian ladies, envying her her rich furs, gave her the name of Zibeline, that of a very rare, almost extinct, wild animal. Zibeline's American unconventionality, her audacity, her wealth, and generosity, set all Paris by the ears. There are fascinating glimpses into the drawing-rooms of the most exclusive Parisian society, and also into the historic greenroom of the Comedie Francaise, on a brilliant "first night." The man to whom she makes graceful restitution of his fortune is a hero of the Franco-Mexican and Franco-Prussian wars, and when she gives him back his property, she throws her heart in with the gift. The story is an interesting study of a brilliant and unconventional American girl as seen by the eyes of a clever Frenchman.

Later came 'La Revue quand meme, comedy, (1894); Souvenirs et Impressions (1897); La Revue retrospective, comedy (1899); and Sonnets' the same year.

PAUL HERVIEU
de l'Academe Francaise.

LETTER FROM JULES CLARETIE TO THE AUTHOR

MY DEAR FRIEND:

I have often declared that I never would write prefaces! But how can one resist a fine fellow who brings one an attractive manuscript, signed with a name popular among all his friends, who asks of one, in the most engaging way, an opinion on the same then a word, a simple word of introduction, like a signal to saddle?

I have read your Zibeline, my dear friend, and this romance your first has given me a very keen pleasure. You told me once that you felt a certain timidity in publishing it. Reassure yourself immediately. A man can not be regarded as a novice when he has known, as you have, all the Parisian literary world so long; or rather, perhaps, I may more accurately say, he is always a novice when he tastes for the first time the intoxication of printer's ink.

You have the quickest of wits and the least possible affectation of gravity, and you have made as well known in Mexico as in Paris your couplets on the end of the Mexican conflict with France. 'Tout Mexico y passera!' Where are they, the 'tol-de-rols' of autumn?

Yesterday I found, in a volume of dramatic criticism by that terrible and charming Jules Barbey d'Aurevilly, an appreciation of one of your comedies which bears a title very appropriate to yourself: 'Honor.' "And this play does him honor," said Barbey d'Aurevilly, "because it is charming, light, and supple, written in flowing verse, the correctness of which does not rob it of its grace."

That which the critic said of your comedy I will say of your romance. It is a pretty fairy-story—all about Parisian fairies, for a great many fairies live in Paris! In fact, more are to be found there than anywhere else! There are good fairies and bad fairies among them. Your own particular fairy is good and she is charming. I am tempted to ask whether you have drawn your characters from life. That is a question which was frequently put to me recently, after I had published 'L'Americaine.' The public longs to possess keys to our books. It is not sufficient for them that a romance is interesting; it must possess also a spice of scandal.

Portraits? You have not drawn any neither in the drawing-rooms where Zibeline scintillates, nor in the foyer of the Comedie Francaise, where for so long a time you have felt yourself at home. Your women are visions and not studies from life and I do not believe that you will object to my saying this.

You should not dislike the "romantic romance," which every one in these days advises us to write as if that style did not begin as far back as the birth of romance itself: as if the Princess of Cleves had not written, and as if Balzac himself, the great realist, had not invented, the finest "romantic romances" that can be found for example,

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the amorous adventure of General de Montriveau and the Duchesse de Langlais!

Apropos, in your charming story there is a General who pleases me very much. How was it that you did not take, after the fashion of Paul de Molenes, a dashing cavalry officer for your hero? you, for whom the literary cavalier has all the attractions of a gentleman and a soldier?

Nothing could be more piquant, alert, chivalrous in short, worthy of a Frenchman than the departure of your hero for the war after that dramatic card-party, which was also a battle and what a battle! where, at the end of the conflict, he left his all upon the green cloth. That is an attractive sketch of the amiable comedienne, who wishes for fair weather and a smooth sea for the soldier lover who is going so far away. It seems to me that I have actually known that pretty girl at some time or another! That chapter is full of the perfume of pearl powder and iris! It is only a story, of course, but it is a magnificent story, which will please many readers.

The public will ask you to write others, be sure of that; and you will do well, my dear friend, for your own sake and for ours, to follow the precept of Denis Diderot: "My friends, write stories; while one writes them he amuses himself, and the story of life goes on, and that is less gay than the stories we can tell."

I do not know precisely whether these last words, which are slightly pessimistic, are those of the good Diderot himself. But they are those of a Parisian of 1892, who has been able to forget his cares and annoyances in reading the story that you have told so charmingly.

With much affection to you, and wishing good luck to Zibeline, I am

Your friend,

JULES CLARETIE
de l'Academie Francaise.

APRIL 26, 1892.

BOOK 1

CHAPTER I. LES FRERES-PROVENCAUX

In the days of the Second Empire, the Restaurant des Freres-Provencaux still enjoyed a wide renown to which its fifty years of existence had contributed more than a little to heighten its fame.

This celebrated establishment was situated near the Beaujolais Gallery of the Palais-Royal, close to the narrow street leading to the Rue Vivienne, and it had been the rendezvous of epicures, either residents of Paris or birds of passage, since the day it was opened.

On the ground floor was the general dining-room, the gathering-place for honest folk from the provinces or from other lands; the next floor had been divided into a succession of private rooms, comfortably furnished, where, screened behind thick curtains, dined somewhat "irregular" patrons: lovers who were in either the dawn, the zenith, or the decline of their often ephemeral fancies. On the top floor, spacious salons, richly decorated, were used for large and elaborate receptions of various kinds.

At times the members of certain social clubs gave in these rooms subscription balls of anacreontic tendencies, the feminine element of which was recruited among the popular gay favorites of the period. Occasionally, also, young fellows about town, of different social rank, but brought together by a pursuit of amusement in common, met here

on neutral ground, where, after a certain hour, the supper-table was turned into a gaming-table, enlivened by the clinking of glasses and the rattle of the croupier's rake, and where to the excitement of good cheer was added that of high play, with its alternations of unexpected gains and disastrous losses.

It was at a reunion of this kind, on the last evening in the month of May, 1862, that the salons on the top floor were brilliantly illuminated. A table had been laid for twenty persons, who were to join in a banquet in honor of the winner of the great military steeplechase at La Marche, which had taken place a few days before. The victorious gentleman-rider was, strange to say, an officer of infantry an unprecedented thing in the annals of this sport.

Heir to a seigneurial estate, which had been elevated to a marquisate in the reign of Louis XII, son of a father who had the strictest notions as to the preservation of pure blood, Henri de Prerolles, early initiated into the practice of the breaking and training of horses, was at eighteen as bold and dashing a rider as he was accomplished in other physical exercises; and although, three years later, at his debut at St. Cyr, he expressed no preference for entering the cavalry service, for which his early training and rare aptitude fitted him, it was because, in the long line of his ancestors which included a marshal of France and a goodly number of lieutenants-general all, without exception, from Ravenna to Fontenoy, had won renown as commanders of infantry.

At the outbreak of the French Revolution, Henri's grandfather, who had distinguished himself in the American War for Independence, left his native land only when he was in the last extremity. As soon as circumstances permitted, he reentered France with his son, upon whom Napoleon conferred a brevet rank, which the recipient accepted of his free will. He began his military experience in Spain, returned safe and well from the retreat from Russia, and fought valiantly at Bautzen and at Dresden. The Restoration by which time he had become chief of his battalion could not fail to advance his career; and the line was about to have another lieutenant-general added to its roll, when the events of 1830 decided Field-Marshal the Marquis de Prerolles to sheathe his sword forever, and to withdraw to his own estate, near the forest of l'Ile-d'Adam, where hunting and efforts toward the improvement of the equine race occupied his latter years.

He died in 1860, a widower, leaving two children: Jeanne, recently married to the Duc de Montgeron, and his son Henri, then a pupil in a military school, who found himself, on reaching his majority, in possession of the chateau and domains of Prerolles, the value of which was from fifteen to eighteen hundred thousand francs.

Having been made sub-lieutenant by promotion on the first day of October, 1861, the young Marquis, already the head of his house and a military leader, asked and obtained the favor of being incorporated with a battalion of chasseurs garrisoned at Vincennes.

Exact in the performance of his military duties, and at the same time ardent in the pursuit of pleasure, he was able, thanks to his robust health, to conciliate the exigencies of the one with the fatigues of the other.

Unfortunately, Henri was fond of gaming, and his natural impetuosity, which showed itself by an emulation of high standards in his military duties, degenerated into recklessness before the baccarat-table. At the end of eighteen months, play, and an expensive liaison with an actress, had absorbed half his fortune, and his paternal inheritance had been mortgaged as well. The actress was a favorite in certain circles and had been very much courted; and this other form of rivalry, springing from the glitter of the footlights, added so much the more fuel to the prodigalities of the inflammable young officer.

Affairs were in this situation when, immediately after Henri's triumph at the race-track, a bettor on the opposite side paid one of his wagers by offering to the victor a grand dinner at the Freres-Provencaux.

CHAPTER II. BIRDS OF PREY

The hero of the night was seated at the middle of one side of the table, in the place of honor. For his 'vis-a-vis' he had his lively friend Fanny Dorville, star of the Palais Royal, while at his right sat Heloise Virot, the "first old woman," or duenna, of the same theatre, whose well known jests and eccentricities added their own piquancy to gay life in Paris. The two artists, being compelled to appear in the after-piece at their theatre that evening, had come to the dinner made up and in full stage costume, ready to appear behind the footlights at the summons of the call-boy.

The other guests were young men accustomed to the surroundings of the weighing-stand and the betting-room, at a time when betting had not yet become a practice of the masses; and most of them felt highly honored to rub elbows with a nobleman of ancient lineage, as was Henri de Prerolles.

Among these persons was Andre Desvanneaux, whose father, a churchwarden at Ste.-Clotilde, had attained a certain social prestige by his good works, and Paul Landry, in his licentiate in a large banking house in Paris. The last named was the son of a ship-owner at Havre, and his character was ambitious and calculating. He cherished, under a quiet demeanor, a strong hope of being able to supply, by the rapid acquisition of a fortune, the deficiencies of his inferior birth, from which his secret vanity suffered severely. Being an expert in all games of chance, he had already accumulated, while waiting for some brilliant coup, enough to lead a life of comparative elegance, thus giving a certain satisfaction to his instincts. He and Henri de Prerolles never yet had played cards together, but the occasion was sure to come some day, and Paul Landry had desired it a long time.

The company, a little silent at first, was becoming somewhat more animated, when a head-waiter, correct, and full of a sense of his own importance, entered the salon, holding out before him with both hands a large tray covered with slender glasses filled with a beverage called "the cardinal's drink," composed of champagne, Bordeaux, and slices of pineapple. The method of blending these materials was a professional secret of the Freres-Provencaux.

Instantly the guests were on their feet, and Heloise, who had been served first, proposed that they should drink the health of the Marquis, but, prompted by one of her facetious impulses, instead of lifting the glass to her own lips, she presented it to those of the waiter, and, raising her arm, compelled him to swallow the contents. Encouraged by laughter and applause, she presented to him a second glass, then a third; and the unhappy man drank obediently, not being able to push away the glasses without endangering the safety of the tray he carried.

Fanny Dorville interceded in vain for the victim; the inexorable duenna had already seized a fourth glass, and the final catastrophe would have been infallibly brought about, had not providence intervened in the person of the call-boy, who, thrusting his head through the half-open doorway, cried, shrilly:

"Ladies, they are about to begin!"

The two actresses hastened away, escorted by Andre Desvanneaux, a modern Tartufe, who, though married, was seen everywhere, as much at home behind the scenes as in church.

Coffee and liqueurs were then served in a salon adjoining the large dining-room, which gave the effect of a private club-room to this part of the restaurant.

Cigars were lighted, and conversation soon turned on feminine charms and the performances of various horses, particularly those of Franc-Comtois, the winner of the military steeplechase. This animal was one of the products of the Prerolles stud, and was ordinary enough on flat ground, but a jumper of the first rank.

At last the clock struck the half hour after eleven, and some of the guests had already manifested their intention to depart, when Paul Landry, who had been rather silent until then, said, carelessly:

"You expect to sleep to-night in Paris, no doubt, Monsieur de Prerolles?"

"Oh, no," Henri replied, "I am on duty this week, and am obliged to return to Vincennes early in the morning. So I shall stay here until it is time for me to go."

"In that case, might we not have a game of cards?" proposed Captain Constantin Lenaieff, military attache to the suite of the Russian ambassador.

"As you please," said Henri.

This proposal decided every one to remain. The company returned to the large dining-room, which, in the mean time, had been again transformed into a gaming-hall, with the usual accessories: a frame for the tally-sheet, a metal bowl to hold rejected playing-cards set in one end of the table, and, placed at intervals around it, were tablets on which the punter registered the amount of the stakes.

On reentering this apartment, Henri de Prerolles approached a sort of counter, and, drawing from his pocket thirty thousand francs in bank-notes, he exchanged them for their value in mother-of-pearl "chips" of different sizes, representing sums from one to five, ten, twenty-five, or a hundred louis. Paul Landry took twenty-five thousand francs' worth; Constantin Unaieff, fifteen thousand; the others, less fortunate or more prudent, took smaller sums; and about midnight the game began.

CHAPTER III. THE GAME

It began quietly enough, the two principal players waiting, before making any bold strokes, to see how the luck should run. The first victory was in favor of Henri, who, at the end of a hand dealt by Constantin Lenaieff, had won about three hundred Louis. Just at this moment the two women returned, accompanied by Desvanneaux.

"I had some difficulty in persuading our charming friends to return," said he; "Mademoiselle Dorville was determined that some one should escort her to her own house."

"You, perhaps, Desvanneaux," said Henri, twisting up the ends of his moustache.

"Not at all," said Fanny; "I wished Heloise to go with me. I have noticed that when I am here you always lose. I fear I have the evil eye."

"Say, rather, that you have no stomach," said Heloise. "Had you made your debut, as I made mine, with Frederic Lemaitre in 'Thirty Years in the Life of an Actor'"

"It certainly would not rejuvenate her," said Henri, finishing the sentence.

"Marquis, you are very impertinent," said the duenna, laughing. "As a penalty, you must lend me five louis."

"With the greatest pleasure."

"Thank you!"

And, as a new hand was about to be dealt, Heloise seated herself at one of the tables. This time Paul Landry put

fifteen thousand francs in the bank.

"Will you do me the favor to cut the cards?" he asked of Fanny, who stood behind Henri's chair.

"What! in spite of my evil eye, Monsieur?"

"I do not fear that, Mademoiselle. Your eyes have always been too beautiful for one of them to change now."

Stale as was this compliment, it had the desired effect, and the young woman thrust vertically into the midst of the pack the cards he held out to her.

"Play, messieurs," said the banker.

"Messieurs and Madame," corrected Heloise, placing her five chips before her, while Henri, at the other table, staked the six thousand francs which he had just won.

"Don't put up more than there is in the bank," objected Paul Landry, throwing a keen glance at the stakes. Having assured himself that on the opposing side to this large sum there were hardly thirty louis, he dealt the cards.

"Eight!" said he, laying down his card.

"Nine!" said Heloise.

"Baccarat!" said Henri, throwing two court-cards into the basket.

The rake rattled on the losing table, but after the small stakes of the winners had been paid, the greater part of the six thousand francs passed into the hands of the banker.

Five times in succession, at the first deal, the same thing happened; and at the sixth round Heloise won six hundred francs, and Henri found himself with no more counters.

"This is the proper moment to retire!" said the duenna, rising from the table. "Are you coming, Fanny?"

"I beg you, let us go now," murmured Mademoiselle Dorville in the ear of her lover.

Her voice was caressing and full of tender promise. The young man hesitated an instant. But to desert the game at his first loss seemed to him an act unworthy of his reputation, and, as between love and pride, the latter finally prevailed.

"I have only an hour or two more to wait. Can not you go home by yourself?" he replied to Fanny's appeal, while Heloise exchanged her counters for tinkling coin, forgetting, no doubt, to reimburse her creditor, who, in fact, gave no thought to the matter.

Henri accompanied the two women to a coach at the door, which had been engaged by the thoughtful and obliging Desvanneaux; and, pressing tenderly the hand of his mistress, he murmured:

"Till to-morrow!"

"To-morrow!" she echoed, her heart oppressed with sad forebodings.

Desvanneaux, whose wife was very jealous of him, made all haste to regain his conjugal abode.

CHAPTER IV. THE RESULT

Meanwhile, Paul Landry had begun badly, and had had some ill turns of luck; nevertheless, feeling that his fortune was about to change, he raised the stakes.

"Does any one take him up?" asked Constantin Lenaeiff.

"I do," said De Prerolles, who had returned to the table.

And, seizing a pencil that lay on the card-table, he signed four cheques of twenty-five thousand francs each. Unfortunately for him, the next hand was disastrous. The stakes were increased, and the bank was broken several times, when Paul Landry, profiting by a heavy gain, doubled and redoubled the preceding stakes, and beheld mounting before him a pile of cheques and counters.

But, as often happens in such circumstances, his opponent, Henri de Prerolles, persisted in his vain battle against ill-luck, until at three o'clock in the morning, controlling his shaken nerves and throwing down his cards, without any apparent anger, he said:

"Will you tell me, gentlemen, how much I owe you?"

After all accounts had been reckoned, he saw that he had lost two hundred and ninety thousand francs, of which two hundred and sixty thousand in cheques belonged to Paul Landry, and the thirty thousand francs' balance to the bank.

"Monsieur de Prerolles," said Paul Landry, hypocritically, "I am ashamed to win such a sum from you. If you wish to seek your revenge at some other game, I am entirely at your service."

The Marquis looked at the clock, calculated that he had still half an hour to spare, and, not more for the purpose of "playing to the gallery" than in the hope of reducing the enormous sum of his indebtedness, he replied:

"Will it be agreeable to you to play six hands of bezique?"

"Certainly, Monsieur. How much a point?"

"Ten francs, if that is not too much."

"Not at all! I was about to propose that amount myself."

A quick movement of curiosity ran through the assembly, and a circle was formed around the two opponents in this exciting match.

Every one knows that bezique is played with four packs of cards, and that the number of points may be continued indefinitely. The essential thing is to win at least one thousand points at the end of each hand; unless a player does this he is said to "pass the Rubicon," becoming twice a loser that is, the victor adds to his own score the points lost by his adversary. Good play, therefore, consists largely in avoiding the "Rubicon" and in remaining master of the game to the last trick, in order to force one's adversary over the "Rubicon," if he stands in danger of it. The first two hands were lost by Landry, who, having each time approached the "Rubicon," succeeded in avoiding it only by the greatest skill and prudence. Immediately his opponent, still believing that good luck must return to him, began to neglect the smaller points in order to make telling strokes, but he became stranded at the very port of success, as it were; so that, deducting the amount of his first winning, he found at the end of the fifth hand that

he had lost six thousand points. Notwithstanding his wonderful self-control, it was not without difficulty that the young officer preserved a calm demeanor under the severe blows dealt him by Fortune. Paul Landry, always master of himself, lowered his eyes that their expression of greedy and merciless joy should not be seen. The nearer the game drew to its conclusion, the closer pressed the circle of spectators, and in the midst of a profound silence the last hand began. Favored from the beginning with the luckiest cards, followed by the most fortunate returns, Paul Landry scored successively "forty, bezique," five hundred and fifteen hundred. He lacked two cards to make the highest point possible, but Henri, by their absence from his own hand, could measure the peril that menaced him. So, surveying the number of cards that remained in stock, he guarded carefully three aces of trumps which might help him to avert disaster. But, playing the only ace that would allow him to score again, Paul Landry announced coldly, laying on the table four queens of spades and four knaves of diamonds:

"Four thousand five hundred!" This was the final stroke. The last hand had wiped out, by eight thousand points, the possessions of Landry's adversary. The former losses of the unfortunate Marquis were now augmented by one hundred and forty thousand francs. Henri became very pale, but, summoning all his pride to meet the glances of the curious, he arose, rang a bell, and called for a pen and a sheet of stamped paper. Then, turning to Paul Landry, he said, calmly "Monsieur, I owe you four hundred thousand francs. Debts of honor are payable within twenty-four hours, but in order to realize this sum, I shall require more time. How long a delay will you grant me?"

"As long as you wish, Monsieur."

"I thank you. I ask a month."

A waiter appeared, bringing the pen and paper.

"Oh, your word will be sufficient for me," said Landry.

"Pardon me!" said the Marquis. "One never knows what may happen. I insist that you shall accept a formal acknowledgment of the debt."

And he wrote:

"I, the undersigned, acknowledge that I owe to Monsieur Paul Landry the sum of four hundred thousand francs, which I promise to pay in thirty days, counting from this date."

He dated, signed, and folded the paper, and handed it to Paul Landry. Then, glancing at the clock, whose hands pointed to a quarter before four, he said:

"Permit me to take leave of you, gentlemen. I have barely time to reach Vincennes before roll-call."

He lighted a cigar, saluted the astonished assembly with perfect coolness, slowly descended the stairs, and jumped into his carriage, the chasseur of the restaurant holding open the door for him.

"To Vincennes!" he cried to the coachman; "and drive like the devil!"

CHAPTER V. A DESPERATE RESOLUTION

The chimneys and roofs of the tall houses along the boulevards stood out sharp and clear in the light of the rising sun. Here and there squads of street-cleaners appeared, and belated hucksters urged their horses toward the markets; but except for these, the streets were deserted, and the little coupe that carried Caesar and his

misfortunes rolled rapidly toward the Barriere du Trone.

With all the coach–windows lowered, in order to admit the fresh morning air, the energetic nobleman, buffeted by ill–luck, suddenly raised his head and steadily looked in the face the consequences of his defeat. He, too, could say that all was lost save honor; and already, from the depths of his virile soul, sprang the only resolution that seemed to him worthy of himself.

When he entered his own rooms in order to dress, his mind was made up; and although, during the military exercises that morning, his commands were more abrupt than usual, no one would have suspected that his mind was preoccupied by any unusual trouble.

He decided to call upon his superior officer that afternoon to request from him authorization to seek an exchange for Africa. Then he went quietly to breakfast at the pension of the officers of his own rank, who, observing his calm demeanor, in contrast to their own, knew that he must be unaware of the important news just published in the morning journals. General de Lorencez, after an unsuccessful attack upon the walls of Puebla, had been compelled to retreat toward Orizaba, and to intrench there while waiting for reenforcements.

This military event awakened the liveliest discussions, and in the midst of the repast a quartermaster entered to announce the reply to the report, first presenting his open register to the senior lieutenant.

"Ah! By Jove, fellows! what luck!" cried that officer, joyously.

"What is it?" demanded the others in chorus.

"Listen to this!" And he read aloud: "General Order: An expedition corps, composed of two divisions of infantry, under the command of General Forey, is in process of forming, in order to be sent to Mexico on urgent business. The brigade of the advance guard will be composed of the First Regiment of Zouaves and the Eighteenth Battalion of infantry. As soon as these companies shall be prepared for war, this battalion will proceed by the shortest route to Toulon; thence they will embark aboard the Imperial on the twenty–sixth day of June next."

Arousing cheer drowned the end of the reading of this bulletin, the tenor of which gave to Henri's aspirations an immediate and more advantageous prospect immediate, because, as his company was the first to march, he was assured of not remaining longer at the garrison; more advantageous, because the dangers of a foreign expedition opened a much larger field for his chances of promotion.

Consequently, less than a month remained to him in which to settle his indebtedness. After the reading of the bulletin, he asked one of his brother officers to take his place until evening, caught the first train to town, and, alighting at the Bastille, went directly to the Hotel de Montgeron, where he had temporary quarters whenever he chose to use them.

"Is the Duke at home?" he inquired of the Swiss.

Receiving an affirmative reply, he crossed the courtyard, and was soon announced to his brother–in–law, the noble proprietor of La Sarthe, deputy of the Legitimist opposition to the Corps Legislatif of the Empire.

The Duc de Montgeron listened in silence to his relative's explanation of his situation. When the recital was finished, without uttering a syllable he opened a drawer, drew out a legal paper, and handed it to Henri, saying:

"This is my marriage contract. Read it, and you will see that I have had, from the head of my family, three hundred and fifteen thousand livres income. I do not say this to you in order to contrast my riches with your ruin, but only to prove to you that I was perfectly well able to marry your sister even had she possessed no dot. That

dot yields seven hundred and fifteen thousand francs' income, at three per cent. We were married under the law of community of goods, which greatly simplifies matters when husband and wife have, as have Jeanne and myself, but one heart and one way of looking at things. To consult her would be, perhaps, to injure her. To-morrow I will sell the necessary stock, and ere the end of the week Monsieur Durand, your notary and ours, shall hold at your disposal the amount of the sum you lost last night."

The blood rose to the cheeks of the young officer.

"I I" he stammered, pressing convulsively the hands of his brother-in-law. "Shall I let you pay the ransom for my madness and folly? Shall I a second time despoil my sister, already robbed by me of one half her rightful share? I should die of shame! Or, rather wait a moment! Let us reverse our situations for an instant, and if you will swear to me that, were you in my place, you would accept Ah, you see! You hesitate as much now as you hesitated little a moment ago in your simple and cordial burst of generosity: Consequently, I refuse!"

"What do you mean to do, then?"

"To sell Prerolles immediately-to-day, if possible. This determination troubles you because of the grief it will cause Jeanne. It will grieve me, too. And the courage to tell this to her is the only effort to which my strength is unequal. Only you can tell it in such a way as to soften the blow "

"I will try to do it," said the Duke.

"I thank you! As to the personal belongings and the family portraits, their place is at Montgeron, is it not?"

"That is understood. Now, one word more, Henri."

"Speak!"

"Have you not another embarrassment to settle?"

"I have indeed, and the sooner the better. Unhappily "

"You have not enough money," finished the Duke. "I have received this morning twenty-five thousand francs' rent from my farms. Will you allow me to lend them to you?"

"To be repaid from the price of the sale? Very willingly, this time."

And he placed in an envelope the notes handed him by his brother-in-law.

"This is the last will and testament of love," said the Marquis, as he departed, to give the necessary instructions to his notary.

CHAPTER VI. THE FAREWELL

His debts were easily reckoned. He owed eight hundred thousand francs to the Credit Foncier; four hundred thousand to Paul Landry; more than one hundred thousand to various jewellers and shopkeepers; twenty-five thousand to the Duc de Montgeron. It was necessary to sell the chateau and the property at one million four hundred thousand francs, and the posters advertising the sale must be displayed without delay.

Then he must say farewell to Fanny Dorville. Nothing should disturb a sensible mind; the man who, with so much

resolution, deprives himself of his patrimonial estates should not meet less bravely the separation imposed by necessity.

As soon as Henri appeared in Fanny's boudoir, she divined that her presentiments of the previous night had not deceived her.

"You have lost heavily?" she asked.

"Very heavily," he replied, kissing her brow.

"And it was my fault!" she cried. "I brought you bad luck, and that wretch of a Landry knew well what he was about when he made me cut the cards that brought you misfortune!"

"No, no, my dear—listen! The only one in fault was I, who allowed myself, through false pride, to be persuaded that I should not seem to fear him."

"Fear him a professional gambler, who lives one knows not how! Nonsense! It is as if one should fight a duel with a fencing—master."

"What do you wish, my dear? The evil is done and it is so great "

"That you have not the means to pay the sum? Oh, but wait a moment."

And taking up a casket containing a superb collar of pearls, she said:

"This is worth fourteen thousand francs. You may well take them from me, since it was you that gave them to me."

No doubt, she had read De Musset, and this action was perhaps a refection of that of Marion, but the movement was sincere. Something of the stern pride of this other Rolla was stirred; a sob swelled his bosom, and two tears those tears that rise to a soldier's eyes in the presence of nobility and goodness fell from his eyes upon the hair of the poor girl.

"I have not come to that yet," he said, after a short silence. "But we must part "

"You are about to marry?" she cried.

"Oh, no!"

"Ah, so much the better!"

In a few words he told her of his approaching departure, and said that he must devote all his remaining time to the details of the mobilization of troops.

"So it is all over!" said Fanny, sadly. "But fear nothing! I have courage, and even if I have the evil eye at play, I know of something that brings success in war. Will you accept a little fetich from me?"

"Yes, but you persist in trying to give me something," he said, placing on a table the sealed envelope he had brought.

"How good you are!" she murmured. "Now promise me one thing: let us dine together once more. Not at the Provencaux, however. Oh, heavens! no! At the Cafe Anglais where we dined before the play the first time we "

The entrance of Heloise cut short the allusion to a memory of autumn.

"Ah, it is you," said Fanny nervously. "You come apropos."

"Is there a row in the family?" inquired Heloise.

"As if there could be!"

"What is it, then?"

"You see Henri, do you not?"

"Well, yes, I do, certainly. What then?"

"Then look at him long and well, for you will not see him again in many a day. He is going to Mexico!"

"To exploit a mine?"

"Yes, Heloise," the officer replied, "a mine that will make the walls of Puebla totter."

"In that case, good luck, my General!" said the duenna, presenting arms with her umbrella.

Fanny could not repress a smile in spite of her tears. Her lover seized this moment to withdraw from her arms and reach the stairs.

"And now, Marquis de Prerolles, go forth to battle!" cried the old actress to him over the banisters, with the air of an artist who knows her proper cue.

CHAPTER VII. THE VOW

Notwithstanding the desire expressed by his mistress, Henri firmly decided not to repeat that farewell scene.

The matter that concerned him most was the wish not to depart without having freed himself wholly from his debt to Paul Landry. Fortunately, because of a kindly interest, as well as on account of the guaranty of the Duc de Montgeron, a rich friend consented to advance the sum; so that, one week before the day appointed for payment, the losing player was able to withdraw his signature from the hands of his greedy creditor.

Relieved from this anxiety, Henri had asked, the night before the day set for departure, for leave of absence for several hours, in order to visit for the last time a spot very dear to him, upon whose walls placards now hung, announcing the sale of the property to take place on the following morning.

No one received warning of this visit in extremis save the steward, who awaited his master before the gates of the chateau, the doors and windows of which had been flung wide open.

At the appointed hour the visitor appeared at the end of the avenue, advancing with a firm step between two hedges bordered with poplars, behind which several brood-mares, standing knee-deep in the rich grass, suckled their foal.

The threshold of the gate crossed, master and man skirted the lawn, traversed the garden, laid out in the French fashion, and, side by side, without exchanging a word, mounted the steps of the mansion. Entering the main hall, the Marquis, whose heart was full of memories of his childhood, stopped a long time to regard alternately the two suites of apartments that joined the vestibule to the two opposite wings. Making a sign to his companion not to follow him, Henri then entered the vast gallery, wherein hung long rows of the portraits of his ancestors; and there, baring his head before that of the Marshal of France whose name he bore, he vowed simply, without excitement, and in a low tone, either to vanquish the enemy or to add, after the manner of his forbears, a glorious page to his family's history.

The object of his pilgrimage having thus been accomplished, the Marquis ordered the steward to see that all the portraits were sent to the Chateau de Montgeron; then, after pressing his hand in farewell, he returned to the station by the road whence he had come, avoiding the village in order to escape the curious eyes of the peasantry.

CHAPTER VIII. IN SEARCH OF GLORY

The next morning the 18th battalion of 'chasseurs', in dress uniform, with knapsacks on their backs and fully armed, awaited in the Gare de Lyon the moment to board the train destined to transport them to the coast.

At a trumpet-call this movement was executed in silence, and in perfect order; and only after all the men were installed did the functionaries who kept the crowd in order take their own places in the carriages, leaving a throng of relatives and friends jostling one another upon the quay.

Fanny Dorville and her friend the duenna tried in vain to reach the compartment wherein Henri had his place, already in marching order; the presence of the Duc and the Duchesse de Montgeron prevented the two women from approaching him. Nevertheless, at the moment when the train began to move slowly out of the station, an employee found the means to slip into the hands of the Marquis a small packet containing the little fetich which his mistress had kept for him. It was a medallion of the Holy Virgin, which had been blessed at Notre-Dame des-Victoires, and it was attached to a long gold chain.

Thirty-six hours later, on the evening of the 26th of June, the battalion embarked aboard the Imperial, which, with steam up, was due to leave the Toulon roadstead at daybreak. At the moment of getting under weigh, the officer in charge of the luggage, who was the last to leave the shore, brought several despatches aboard the ship, and handed to Lieutenant de Prerolles a telegram, which had been received the evening before at the quay.

The Marquis opened it and read: "Chateau and lands sold for 1,450,000 francs. Everything paid, 1600 francs remain disposable."

"That is to say," thought the officer, sadly, "I have my pay and barely three thousand francs' income!"

Leaning both elbows upon the taffrail, he gazed long at the shores of France, which appeared to fly toward the horizon; then, brusquely turning his eyes to the quarters filled with the strong figures and manly faces of the young foot-soldiers of the 18th battalion, he said to himself that among such men, under whatever skies or at whatever distance, one found his country glancing aloft where floated above his head the folds of his flag.

CHAPTER IX

Twenty-three years after the events already recorded, on a cold afternoon in February, the Bois de Boulogne appeared to be draped in a Siberian mantle rarely seen at that season. A deep and clinging covering of snow hid the ground, and the prolonged freezing of the lakes gave absolute guaranty of their solidity.

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy, Zibeline, v1

A red sun, drowned in mist, threw a mild radiance over the landscape, and many pedestrians stamped their feet around the borders of the lake belonging to the Skaters' Club, and watched the hosts of pretty women descending from their carriages, delighted at the opportunity afforded them, by this return of winter, to engage in their favorite exercise.

Received on her arrival by one of the attendants posted at the entrance, each of the fair skaters entered in turn a small building reserved for ladies, whence she soon came forth in full skating array, ready to risk herself on the ice, either alone or guided by the hand of some expert cavalier.

Here and there, around the enclosure, large garden-seats, shaped like sentry-boxes, were reserved for the mothers and sisters of the members of the club, so that they could observe, from a comfortable shelter, the evolutions of those in whom they were interested.

Within two of these nooks, side by side, sat the Duchesse de Montgeron, president, and the Comtesse Desvanneaux, vice-president of the Charity Orphan Asylum; the latter had come to look on at the first essay on the ice of her daughter, Madame de Thomery; the former, to judge the skill of her brother, General the Marquis de Prerolles, past-master in all exercises of strength and skill.

At forty-five years of age, the young General had preserved the same grace and slenderness that had distinguished him when he had first donned the elegant tunic of an officer of chasseuys. His hair, cut rather short, had become slightly gray on his temples, but his jaunty moustache and well-trimmed beard were as yet innocent of a single silver thread. The same energy shone in his eyes, the same sonority rang in his voice, which had become slightly more brusque and authoritative from his long-continued habit of command.

In a small round hat, with his hands in the pockets of an outing-jacket, matching his knickerbockers in color, he strolled to and fro near his sister, now encouraging Madame de Thomery, hesitating on the arm of her instructor, now describing scientific flourishes on the ice, in rivalry against the crosses dashed off by Madame de Lisieux and Madame de Nointel two other patronesses of the orphanage the most renowned among all the fashionable skaters. This sort of tourney naturally attracted all eyes, and the idlers along the outer walks had climbed upon the paling in order to gain a better view of the evolutions, when suddenly a spectacle of another kind called their attention to the entrance-gate in their rear.

Passing through the Porte Dauphine, and driven by a young woman enveloped in furs, advanced swiftly, over the crisp snow, a light American sleigh, to which was harnessed a magnificent trotter, whose head and shoulders emerged, as from an aureole, through that flexible, circular ornament which the Russians call the 'doug'a'.

Having passed the last turn of the path, the driver slackened her grasp, and the horse stopped short before the entrance. His owner, throwing the reins to a groom perched up behind, sprang lightly to the ground amid a crowd of curious observers, whose interest was greatly enhanced by the sight of the odd-looking vehicle.

The late-comer presented her card of invitation to the proper functionary, and went across the enclosure toward the ladies' salon.

"Ah! there is Zibeline!" cried Madame Desvanneaux, with an affected air. "Do you know her?" she inquired of the Duchesse de Montgeron.

"Not yet," the Duchess replied. "She did not arrive in Paris until the end of spring, just at the time I was leaving town for the seashore. But I know that she says her real name is Mademoiselle de Vermont, and that she was born in Louisiana, of an old French family that emigrated to the North, and recently became rich in the fur trade—from which circumstance Madame de Nointel has wittily named her 'Zibeline.' I know also that she is an orphan, that she has an enormous fortune, and has successively refused, I believe, all pretenders who have thus far aspired to

her hand."

"Yes gamblers, and fortune-hunters, in whose eyes her millions excuse all her eccentricities."

"Do I understand that she has been presented to you?" asked the Duchess, surprised.

"Well, yes—by the old Chevalier de Sainte-Foy, one of her so-called cousins rather distant, I fancy! But the independent airs of this young lady, and her absolute lack of any respectable chaperon, have decided me to break off any relations that might throw discredit on our patriarchal house," Madame Desvanneaux replied volubly, as ready to cross herself as if she had been speaking of the devil!

The Duchess could not repress a smile, knowing perfectly that her interlocutor had been among the first to demand for her son the hand of Mademoiselle de Vermont!

During this dialogue, the subject of it had had time to cast aside her fur cloak, to fasten upon her slender, arched feet, clad in dainty, laced boots, a pair of steel skates, with tangent blades, and without either grooves or straps, and to dart out upon this miniature sheet of water with the agility of a person accustomed to skating on the great lakes of America.

She was a brunette, with crisply waving hair, a small head, well-set, and deep yet brilliant eyes beneath arched and slightly meeting brows. Her complexion was pale, and her little aquiline nose showed thin, dilating nostrils. Her rosy lips, whose corners drooped slightly, revealed dazzling teeth, and her whole physiognomy expressed an air of haughty disdain, somewhat softened by her natural elegance.

Her cloth costume, which displayed to advantage her slender waist and graceful bust, was of simple but elegant cut, and was adorned with superb trimmings of black fox, which matched her toque and a little satin-lined muff, which from time to time she raised to her cheek to ward off the biting wind.

Perhaps her skirt was a shade too short, revealing in its undulations a trifle too much of the dainty hose; but the revelation was so shapely it would have been a pity to conceal it!

"Very bad form!" murmured Madame Desvanneaux.

"But one can not come to a place like this in a skirt with a train," was the more charitable thought of the Duchess.

Meantime the aforesaid tournament went on in the centre of the sheet of ice, and Zibeline, without mingling with the other skaters, contented herself with skirting the borders of the lake, rapidly designing a chain of pierced hearts on the smooth surface, an appropriate symbol of her own superiority.

Annoyed to see himself eclipsed by a stranger, the General threw a challenging glance in her direction, and, striking out vigorously in a straight line, he sped swiftly toward the other end of the lake.

Stung to the quick by his glance, Mademoiselle de Vermont darted after him, passed him halfway along the course, and, wheeling around with a wide, outward curve, her body swaying low, she allowed him to pass before her, maintaining an attitude which her antagonist might interpret as a salute, courteous or ironic, as he chose.

By this time the crowd was gradually diminishing. The daylight was waning, and a continued sound of closing gates announced the retreat of the gay world toward Paris.

Zibeline alone, taking advantage of the free field, lingered a few moments to execute some evolutions in the deepening twilight, looking like the heroines in the old ballads, half-visible, through the mists, \ to the vivid

imagination of the Scottish bards.

Henri de Prerolles had entered his sister's carriage, in company with Madame Desvanneaux and Madame Thomery, and during the drive home, these two gentle dames for the daughter was worthy of the mother did not fail to sneer at the fair stranger, dilating particularly upon the impropriety of the challenging salute she had given to the General, with whom she was unacquainted.

"But my brother could hardly request his seconds to call upon her for that!" laughingly said the Duchess who, it seemed, had decided to defend the accused one in all attacks made upon her.

"Look! Here she comes! She is passing us again. One would think she was deliberately trying to do it!" exclaimed Madame Desvanneaux, just before their carriage reached the Arc de Triomphe.

Zibeline's sleigh, which had glided swiftly, and without hindrance, along the unfrequented track used chiefly by equestrians, had indeed overtaken the Duchess's carriage. Turning abruptly to the left, it entered the open gateway belonging to one of the corner houses of the Rond-Point de l'Etoile.

"Decidedly, the young lady is very fond of posing," said the General, with a shrug, and, settling himself in his corner, he turned his thoughts elsewhere.

Having deposited her two friends at their own door, the Duchess ordered the coachman to take her home, and at the foot of the steps she said to her brother:

"Will you dine with us to-night?"

"No, not to-night," he replied, "but we shall meet at the theatre."

And, crossing the court, he entered his little bachelor apartment, which he had occupied from time to time since the days when he was only a sub-lieutenant.

CHAPTER X. GENERAL DE PREROLLES

The sub-lieutenant had kept his word, and the progress of his career deserves detailed mention.

He was a lieutenant at the taking of Puebla, where he was first to mount in the assault of the Convent of Guadalupe. Captain of the Third Zouaves after the siege of Oajaca, he had exercised, during the rest of the expedition, command over a mounted company, whose duty was to maintain communications between the various columns, continuing, at the same time, their operations in the Michoacan.

This confidential mission, requiring as much power to take the initiative as it demanded a cool head, gave the Marquis opportunity to execute, with rapidity and decision, several master-strokes, which, in the following circumstances, won for him the cross of the Legion of Honor.

The most audacious of the guerrillas who had devastated this fertile country was a chief called Regulas. He pillaged the farms, stopped railway trains, boldly demanding ransom from captives from the municipal governments of large towns. He was continually, active, and always inaccessible.

Warned by his scouts that the followers of this villain menaced the town of Pazcuaro, Captain de Prerolles prepared himself eagerly to meet them. He overtook them in a night march, and fell upon them unexpectedly, just as they were holding up the diligence from Morelia to Guadalajara. His plans had been so well laid that not a man

escaped. What was the surprise of the French officer to find, among the travellers, delivered by himself from certain death, Paul Landry, the principal cause of his ruin, who the chances of war now laid under obligations to him!

"This is my revenge," said the Captain, simply, to Landry, attempting to avoid his thanks, and returning to him intact his luggage, of which the chinacos had not had time to divide the contents.

Reconciled in Algiers with his regiment, Henri de Prerolles did not again quit the province of Constantine except to serve in the army of the Rhine, as chief of battalion in the line, until the promotions which followed the declaration of war in 1870. Officer of the Legion of Honor for his gallantry at Gravelotte and at St. Privat, and assigned for his ability to the employ of the chief of corps, he had just been called upon to assume command of his former battalion of chasseurs, when the disastrous surrender of Metz left him a prisoner of war in the hands of the Germans.

Profoundly affected by this disaster, but learning that the conflict still continued, he refused to avail himself of the offer of comparative freedom in the city, provided he would give his parole not to attempt to escape. He was therefore conducted to a distant fortress near the Russian frontier, and handed over to the captain of the landwehr, who received instructions to keep a strict guard over him.

This officer belonged to the engineering corps, and directed, at the same time, the work of repairs within the citadel, in charge of a civilian contractor.

Taking into consideration the rank of his prisoner, the captain permitted the Marquis to have with him his orderly, an Alsatian, who twice a day brought from the inn his chief's repasts. This functionary had permission also, from ten o'clock in the morning until sunset, to promenade in the court under the eye of the sentinel on guard at the entrance. At five o'clock in the evening, the officer of the landwehr politely shut up his guest in his prison, double-locked the door, put the key in his pocket, and appeared no more until the next morning.

The middle of November had arrived; heavy snows had already fallen, and the prisoner amused himself by constructing fortifications of snow a work which his amiable jailer followed with a professional interest, giving him advice regarding modifications proper to introduce in the defense of certain places, himself putting a finger in the pie in support of his demonstration.

This sort of amusement was followed so industriously that in a few days a kind of rampart was erected in front of the casemate of the fortress, behind which, by stooping a little, a man of ordinary height could easily creep along unseen by the sentinel.

While pursuing his work of modelling in snow, the Marquis de Prerolles had taken care to observe the goings and comings of the civilian contractor, who, wearing a tall hat and attired in a black redingote, departed regularly every day at half-past four, carrying a large portfolio under his arm. To procure such a costume and similar accessories for himself was easy, since the Marquis's orderly spoke the language of the country; and to introduce them into the prison, hidden in a basket of provisions, was not difficult to accomplish.

To execute all this required only four trips to and fro. At the end of forty-eight hours, the necessary aids to escape were in the proper place, hidden under the snow behind the bastion. More than this, the clever Alsatian had slipped a topographical map of the surrounding country between two of the plates in the basket. According to the scale, the frontier was distant only about five leagues, across open country, sparsely settled with occasional farms which would serve as resting-places.

By that time, the plan of escape was drawn up. Upon the day fixed for his flight, the Marquis assumed his disguise, rolled up his own uniform to look like a man asleep in his bed, lying after the fashion of a sleeping

soldier; and pleading a slight illness as an excuse for not dining that evening, and, not without emotion, curled himself up behind the snowy intrenchment which his jailer himself had helped to fashion. That worthy man, only too glad to be able to rejoin his 'liebe frau' a little earlier than usual, peeped through the half-open door of the prisoner's room and threw a glance at the little cot-bed.

"Good-night, Commander!" said the honest fellow, in a gentle voice.

Then he double-locked the door, according to custom, and disappeared whistling a national air. A quarter of an hour later the contractor left the place, and as soon as the functionary who had seen him depart was relieved by another, the prisoner left his hiding-place, crossed the drawbridge in his turn, simulating the gait of his twin, and, without any hindrance, rejoined his orderly at the place agreed upon. The trick was played!

A matter of twenty kilometres was a mere trifle for infantry troopers. They walked as lightly as gymnasts, under a clear sky, through the fields, guided by the lights in the farmhouses, and at nine o'clock, having passed the frontier, they stumbled upon a post of Cossacks ambuscaded behind a hedge!

Unfortunately, at that time the Franco-Russian alliance was still in embryo, and an agreement between the two neighboring States interdicted all passage to Frenchmen escaping from the hands of their conquerors. The two deserters were therefore conducted to the major of the nearest garrison, who alone had the right to question them.

As soon as they were in his presence, Henri could not restrain a start of surprise, for he recognized Constantin Lenaieff, one of his adversaries on the fatal night of the Freres-Provencaux.

"Who are you?" demanded the Major, brusquely.

"A dealer in Belgian cattle, purveyor to the German intendant," hazarded the prisoner, who had his reply all prepared.

"You nonsense! You are a French officer; that is plain enough to be seen, in spite of your disguise."

The Major advanced a step in order to examine the prisoner more closely.

"Good heavens!" he muttered, "I can not be mistaken "

He made a sign to his soldiers to retire, then, turning to Henri, he said:

"You are the Marquis de Prerolles!" and he extended his hand cordially to the former companion of his pleasures.

In a few words Henri explained to him the situation.

"My fate is in your hands," he concluded. "Decide it!"

"You are too good a player at this game not to win it," Lenaieff replied, "and I am not a Paul Landry, to dispute it with you. Here is a letter of safe-conduct made out in due form; write upon it any name you choose. As for myself, I regard you absolutely as a Belgian citizen, and I shall make no report of this occurrence. Only, let me warn you, as a matter of prudence, you would do well not to linger in this territory, and if you need money "

"I thank you!" replied the nobleman, quickly, declining with his customary proud courtesy. "But I never shall forget the service you have rendered me!"

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy, Zibeline, v1

A few moments later, the two travellers drove away in a carriage toward the nearest railway, in order to reenter France by way of Vienna and Turin.

They passed the Austrian and Italian frontiers without difficulty; but at the station at Modena a too-zealous detective of the French police, struck with the Alsatian accent of the orderly, immediately decided that they were two Prussian spies, and refused to allow them to proceed, since they could show him no passports.

"Passports!" cried Henri de Prerolles, accompanying his exclamation with the most Parisian oath that ever had reverberated from the Rue Laffitte to the Madeleine.

"Here is my passport!" he added, drawing from his pocket his officer's cross, which he had taken good care not to allow to become a souvenir in the hands of his jailer. "And if that does not satisfy you, give me a pen."

Suiting the action to the word, he seized a pen and wrote out the following telegram:

"DEPUTY OF WAR, TOURS:

"Escaped from prisons of the enemy, I demand admittance to France, and official duties suitable to my rank, that I may cooperate in the national defence.

"DE PREROLLES, Commandant."

He handed the paper to the police agent, saying: "Do me the favor to forward this despatch with the utmost expedition."

As soon as the agent had glanced at the message, he swept a profound salute. "Pass on, Commandant," said he, in a tone of great respect.

Promoted to a higher rank, and appointed commander of a regiment of foot, the Lieutenant-Colonel de Prerolles rejoined the army of Chanzy, which, having known him a long time, assigned to him the duties of a brigadier-general, and instructed him to cover his retreat from the Loire on the Sarthe.

In the ensuing series of daily combats, the auxiliary General performed all that his chief expected of him, from Orleans to the battle of Maus, where, in the thick of the fight, a shell struck him in the breast. It is necessary to say that on the evening before he had noticed that the little medallion which had been given to him by Fanny Dorville, worn from its chain by friction, had disappeared from his neck. Scoffing comrades smiled at the coincidence; the more credulous looked grave.

The wound was serious, for, transported to the Chateau de Montgeron, a few leagues distant, the Marquis was compelled to remain there six months before he was in fit condition to rejoin his command. Toward the end of his convalescence, in June, 1871, the brother and sister resolved to make a pious pilgrimage to the cradle of their ancestors.

Exactly nine years had elapsed since the castle and lands had been sold at auction and fallen into the possession of a company of speculators, who had divided it and resold it to various purchasers. Only the farm of Valpendant, with a house of ancient and vast construction, built in the time of Philippe-Auguste, remained to an old tenant, with his dependencies and his primitive methods of agriculture.

Leaving the train at the Beaumont tunnel, the two travellers made their way along a road which crosses the high plateau that separates the forest of Carnelle from the forest of the Ile-d'Adam, whence one can discern the steeple of Prerolles rising above the banks of the Oise.

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy, Zibeline, v1

From this culminating point they beheld the chateau transformed into a factory, the park cut up into countryseats, the fields turned into market-gardens! With profound sadness the brother and the sister met each other's glance, and their eyes filled with tears, as if they stood before a tomb on All Souls' Day.

"No expiation is possible," said Henri to Jeanne, pressing her hand convulsively. "I must go I must move on forever and ever, like the Wandering Jew."

Thanks to the influence of the Duke of Montgeron, whose faithful constituents had sent him to the National Assembly, his brother-in-law had been transferred to a regiment of zouaves, of which he became colonel in 1875, whereupon he decided to remain in Africa during the rest of his life.

But Tunis and Tonquin opened new horizons to him. Landing as a brigadier-general at Haiphong, he was about to assume, at Bac-Ninh, his third star, when the Minister of War, examining the brilliant record of this officer who, since 1862, never had ceased his service to his country, called him to take command of one of the infantry divisions of the army of Paris, a place which he had occupied only a few months before the events related in the preceding chapter.

CHAPTER XI. EUGENIE GONTIER

Few salons in Paris have so imposing an air as the foyer of the dramatic artists of the Comedie Francaise, a rectangular room of fine proportions, whose walls are adorned with portraits of great actors, representing the principal illustrations of the plays that have been the glory of the house Mademoiselle Duclos, by Largilliere; Fleury, by Gerard; Moliere crowned, by Mignard; Baron, by De Troy, and many others.

At the left of the entrance, separated by a large, high mirror which faced the fireplace, two other canvases, signed by Geffroy, represent the foyer itself, in costumes of the classic repertoire, the greater part of the eminent modern 'societaires', colleagues and contemporaries of the great painter.

Between the windows, two pedestals, surmounted by busts of Mademoiselle Clairon and Mademoiselle Dangeville, stood, one on each side of the great regulator made by Robin, clockmaker to the king which dominated the bust of Moliere after Houdon seeming to keep guard over all this gathering of artistic glory.

Opposite this group, hanging above a large table of finely chiselled iron, were two precious autographs under glass: a brevet of pension, dated 1682, signed Louis and countersigned Colbert; an act of notary, dated 1670, bearing the signature of Moliere, the master of the house.

Disposed about the room were sofas, armchairs, and tete-a-tete seats in oak, covered with stamped green velvet.

Here, at the first representations of new plays, or at important revivals of old ones, flocked literary notables and the regular frequenters of the theatre, eager to compliment the performers; here, those favored strangers who have the proper introduction, and who wish to see the place at close range, are graciously conducted by the administrator-general or by the officer for the week.

Here it was that the Marquis de Prerolles appeared in the evening after his experience at the skating-pond. He had dressed, and had dined in great haste at a restaurant near the theatre.

The posters announced a revival of 'Adrienne Lecouvreur', with Mademoiselle Gontier in the principal role, in which she was to appear for the first time.

Eugenie Gontier was, it was said, the natural daughter of a great foreign lord, who had bequeathed to her a certain

amount of money. Therefore, she had chosen the theatrical life less from necessity than from inclination.

She was distinguished in presence, a great favorite with the public, and had a wide circle of friends, among whom a rich banker, the Baron de Samoreau, greatly devoted to her, had made for her investments sufficiently profitable to enable her to occupy a mansion of her own, and to open a salon which became a favorite rendezvous with many persons distinguished in artistic, financial, and even political circles. Talent being the guaranty of good companionship, this salon became much frequented, and General de Prerolles had become one of its most assiduous visitors.

The first act had begun. Although the charming artist was not to appear until the second act, she had already descended from her dressing-room, and, finding herself alone in the greenroom, was putting a final touch to her coiffure before the mirror when the General entered.

He kissed her hand gallantly, and both seated themselves in a retired corner between the fireplace and the window.

"I thank you for coming so early," said Eugenie. "I wished very much to see you to-night, in order to draw from your eyes a little of your courage before I must face the footlights in a role so difficult and so superb."

"The fire of the footlights is not that of the enemy above all, for you, who are so sure of winning the battle."

"Alas! does one ever know? Although at the last rehearsal Monsieur Legouve assured me that all was perfect, look up there at that portrait of Rachel, and judge for yourself whether I have not reason to tremble at my audacity in attempting this role after such a predecessor."

"But you yourself caused this play to be revived," said Henri.

"I did it because of you," Eugenie replied.

"Of me?"

"Yes. Am I not your Adrienne, and is not Maurice de Saxe as intrepid as you, and as prodigal as you have been? Was he not dispossessed of his duchy of Courlande, as you were of your "

A gesture from Henri prevented her from finishing the sentence.

"Pardon me!" said she. "I had forgotten how painful to you is any reference to that matter. We will speak only of your present renown, and of the current of mutual sympathy that attracts each of us toward the other. For myself, that attraction began on the fourteenth of last July. You had just arrived at Paris, and a morning journal, in mentioning the troops, and the names of the generals who appeared at the review, related, apropos of your military exploits, many exciting details of your escape during the war. Do you recall the applause that greeted you when you marched past the tribunes? I saw you then for the first time, but I should have known you among a thousand! The next day "

"The next day," Henri interrupted, "it was my turn to applaud you. I had been deprived a long time of the pleasures of the theatre, of which I am very fond, and I began by going to the Comedie Francaise, where you played, that night, the role of Helene in 'Mademoiselle de la Seigliere.' Do you remember?"

"Do I remember! I recognized you instantly, sitting in the third row in the orchestra."

"I had never seen you until then," Henri continued, "but that sympathetic current was soon established, from the moment you appeared until the end of the second piece. As it is my opinion that any officer is sufficiently a gentleman to have the right to love a girl of noble birth, I fell readily under the spell in which she whom you represented echoed my own sentiments. Bernard Stamply also had just returned from captivity, and the more enamored of you he became the more I pleased myself with fancying my own personality an incarnation of his, with less presumption than would be necessary for me to imagine myself the hero of which you spoke a moment ago. After the play, a friend brought me here, presented me to you "

"And the sympathetic current did the rest!" added Eugenie Gontier, looking at him tenderly. "Since then you have consecrated to me a part of whatever time is at your disposal, and I assure you that I never have been so happy, nor have felt so flattered, in my life."

"Second act!" came the voice of the call-boy from the corridor.

"Will you return here after the fourth act?" said the actress, rising. "I shall wish to know how you find me in the great scene, and whether there is another princess de Bouillon among the audience beware of her!"

"You know very well that there is not."

"Not yet, perhaps, but military men are so inconstant! By and by, Maurice!" she murmured, with a smile.

"By and by, Adrienne!" Henri replied, kissing her hand.

He accompanied her to the steps that led to the stage, and, lounging along the passage that ends at the head of the grand stairway, he entered the theatre and hastened to his usual seat in the third row of the orchestra.

CHAPTER XII. RIVAL BEAUTIES

It was Tuesday, the subscription night; the auditorium was as much the more brilliant as the play was more interesting than on other nights. In one of the proscenium boxes sat the Duchesse de Montgeron with the Comtesse de Lisieux; in another the Vicomtesse de Nointel and Madame Thomery. In the first box on the left Madame Desvanneaux was to be seen, with her husband and her son, the youthful and recently rejected pretender to the hand of Mademoiselle de Vermont.

Among the subscription seats in the orchestra sat the Baron de Samoreau, the notary Durand, treasurer of the Industrial Orphan Asylum; the aide-de-camp of General Lenaieff, beside his friend the Marquis de Prerolles. One large box, the first proscenium loge on the right, was still unoccupied when the curtain rose on the second act.

The liaison of Eugenie Gontier with the Marquis de Prerolles was not a mystery; from the moment of her entrance upon the scene, it was evident that she "played to him," to use a phrase in theatrical parlance. Thus, after the recital of the combat undertaken in behalf of Adrienne by her defender a recital which she concluded in paraphrasing these two lines:

Paraissez, Navarrois, Maures et Castiliens,
Et tout ce que l'Espagne a produit de vaillants,

many opera-glasses were directed toward the spectator to whom the actress appeared to address herself, when suddenly a new object of interest changed the circuit of observation. The door of the large, right-hand box opened, and Zibeline appeared, accompanied by the Chevalier de Sainte-Foy, an elderly gallant, carefully dressed and wearing many decorations, and whose respectable tale of years could give no occasion for malicious

comment on his appearance in the role of 'cavalier servente'. Having assisted his companion to remove her mantle, he profited by the instant of time she took to settle her slightly ruffled plumage before the mirror, to lay upon the railing of the box her bouquet and her lorgnette. Then he took up a position behind the chair she would occupy, ready to assist her when she might deign to sit down. His whole manner suggested a chamberlain of the ancient court in the service of a princess.

Mademoiselle de Vermont disliked bright colors, and wore on this occasion a robe of black velvet, of which the 'decolletee' bodice set off the whiteness of her shoulders and her neck, the latter ornamented with a simple band of cherry-colored velvet, without jewels, as was suitable for a young girl. Long suede gloves, buttoned to the elbow, outlined her well-modelled arms, of which the upper part emerged, without sleeves, from lace ruffles gathered in the form of epaulets.

The men admired her; the women sought some point to criticise, and had the eyes of Madame Desvanneaux been able to throw deadly projectiles, her powerful lorgnette would have become an instrument of death for the object of her resentment.

"This morning," said the irreconcilable matron, "she showed us her ankles; this evening she allows us to see the remainder."

"I should have been very well pleased, however " murmured young Desvanneaux, with regret.

"If you had married her, Victor," said his mother, "I should have taken full charge of her wardrobe, and should have made some decided changes, I assure you."

Perfectly indifferent to the general curiosity, Zibeline in her turn calmly reviewed the audience. After exploring the boxes with her opera-glass, she lowered it to examine the orchestra stalls, and, perceiving the Marquis, she fixed her gaze upon him. Undoubtedly she knew the reason for the particular attention which he paid to the stage, because, until the end of the act, her glance was divided alternately between the General and the actress.

As the curtain fell on this act the spectators turned their backs to the footlights, and Lenaieff, indicating Zibeline to his friend, said in his slightly Slavonic accent:

"Who is that pretty woman, my dear Henri?"

"One of Jules Verne's personages, a product of the land of furs."

"Do you know her?"

"Not at all. I have a prejudice against girls that are too rich. Why do you ask?"

"Because it seems to me that she looks at you very attentively."

"Indeed! I had not noticed it."

In saying this, the General exaggerated! He had been perfectly well aware of the gaze of Mademoiselle de Vermont, but whether he still cherished a slight resentment against the lady, or whether her appearance really displeased him, he cut the conversation short and went to pay his respects to the occupants of several boxes.

Evidently Zibeline knew few persons in society, for no visitor appeared in her box. However, after the next act she made a sign to M. Durand. That gentleman rejoined the Baron de Samoreau in the corridor and took him to meet Zibeline, and a sort of council appeared to be going on in the rear of her box.

"What the deuce can she be talking about to them?" said Desvanneaux to his wife.

"A new offer of marriage, probably. They say she declares she will marry no one of lower rank than a prince, in order to complete our chagrin! Perhaps they have succeeded in finding one for her!"

The instructions that Mademoiselle de Vermont gave to the two men must have been easy to execute, for neither the notary nor the banker seemed to raise the least objection. The conversation was finished, and both gentlemen saluted her, preparing to take leave, when she said to M. Durand:

"You understand that the meeting is for tomorrow?"

"At five o'clock," he replied.

"Very well. I will stop for you at your door at a quarter of an hour before that time."

The fourth act had begun, that scene in which Adrienne accomplishes her generous sacrifice in furnishing herself the ransom which must deliver her unfaithful lover. The rapt attention that Zibeline paid to this scene, and the slight movements of her head, showed her approval of this disinterested act. Very touching in her invocation to her "old Corneille," Mademoiselle Gontier was superb at the moment when the comedienne, knowing at last who is her rival, quotes from Racine that passage in 'Phedre' which she throws, so to speak, in the face of the patrician woman:

. . . . Je sais ses perfidies,
OEnone! et ne suis point de ces femmes hardies
Qui, goutant dans la crime une honteuse paix,
Ont su se faire un front qui ne rougit jamais.

From the place she was to obliged to take in the arrangement of the scene, the apostrophe and the gestures of the actress appeared to be unconsciously directed toward Mademoiselle de Vermont, who could not restrain a startled movement.

"Look! One would think that Zibeline took that allusion for herself," said Madame Desvanneaux, whom nothing escaped.

On reentering the greenroom, after two well-deserved recalls, Eugenie Gontier was soon surrounded by a throng of admirers who had come to congratulate her upon her success.

"Were you pleased, Henri?" she said in a low tone to the General.

"Enthusiastically!" he replied.

"Ah, then I can die happy!" she said, laughingly.

As she traversed the ranks of her admirers to go to change her costume for the last act, she found herself face to face with Zibeline, who, having quickly recovered from her emotion, was advancing on the arm of the Chevalier de Sainte-Foy.

"My dear child," said the old nobleman to the actress, "I bring to you Mademoiselle de Vermont, who wishes to say to you herself "

"That Mademoiselle must be very tired of listening to our praises," interrupted Zibeline. "But if the tribute of a

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy, Zibeline, v1

foreigner can prove to her that her prestige is universal, I beg that she will accept these flowers which I dared not throw to her from my box."

"Really, Mademoiselle, you embarrass me!" Eugenie replied, somewhat surprised.

"Oh, you need not fear to take them they are not poisoned!" added Zibeline, smiling.

And, after a gracious inclination of her head, to which the actress responded with a deep courtesy, Zibeline took again the arm of her escort in order to seek her carriage, without waiting for the end of the play.

Three-quarters of an hour later, as, the audience was leaving the theatre, M. Desvanneaux recounted to whoever chose to listen that Mademoiselle de Vermont had passed the whole of the last 'entr'acte' in the greenroom corridor, in a friendly chat with Eugenie Gontier.