BOOK III

THE FINAL CUE

CHAPTER I

OVERLOOKING THE COURT-YARD

"In the will of the Marquis de Ligne, probated yesterday, all of the property, real and personal, is left to his daughter, Constance," wrote Straws in his paper shortly after the passing of the French nobleman. "The document states this disposition of property is made as 'an act of atonement and justice to my daughter, whose mother I deserted, taking advantage of the French law to annul my marriage in England.' The legitimacy of the birth of this, his only child, is thereupon fully acknowledged by the marquis after a lapse of many years and long after the heretofore unrecognized wife had died, deserted and forgotten. Thrown on her own resources, the young child, with no other friend than Manager Barnes, battled with the world; now playing in taverns or barns, like the players of interludes, the strollers of old, or 'vagabonds', as the great and mighty Junius, from his lofty plane, termed them. The story of that period of 'vagrant'

life adds one more chapter to the annals of strolling players which already include such names as Kemble, Siddons and Kean.

"From the Junius category to a public favorite of New Orleans has been no slight transition, and now, to appear in the rôle of daughter of a marquis and heiress to a considerable estate--truly man--and woman--play many parts in this brief span called life! But in making her sole heir the marquis specifies a condition which will bring regrets to many of the admirers of the actress. He robs her of her birthright from her mother. The will stipulates that the recipient give up her profession, not because it is other than a noble one, but 'that she may the better devote herself to the duties of her new position and by her beneficence and charity remove the stain left upon an honored name by my second wife, the Duchesse D'Argens'."

The marquis' reference to "charity" and "beneficence" was in such ill-accord with his character that it might be suspected an adroit attorney, in drawing up the document, had surreptitiously inserted it. His proud allusion to his honored name and slurring suggestion of the taint put upon it by his second wife demonstrated the marquis was not above the foibles of his kind, overlooking his own light conduct and dwelling on that of his noble helpmate. It was the final taunt, and, as the lady had long since been laid in God's Acre, where there is only silence divine, it received no answer, and the world was welcome to digest and gorge it and make the most of it.

But although the marquis and his lady had no further interest in subsequent events, growing out of their brief sojourn on earth, the contents of the will afforded a theme of gossip for the living and molded the affairs of one in new shape and manner. On the same day this public exposition appeared, Barnes and the young actress were seated in the law office of Marks and Culver, a room overlooking a court-yard, brightened by statues and urns of flowers. A plaster bust of Justinian gazed benignly through the window at a fountain; a steel engraving of Jeremy Bentham watched the butterflies, and Hobbes and John Austin, austere in portraiture, frowned darkly down upon the flowering garden. While the manager and Constance waited for the attorney to appear, they were discussing, not for the first time, the proviso of the will to which Straws had regretfully alluded.

"Yes," said Barnes, folding the newspaper which contained Straws' article and placing it in his pocket; "you should certainly give up the stage. We must think of the disappointments, the possible failure, the slender reward. There was your mother--such an actress!--yet toward the last the people flocked to a younger rival. I have often thought anxiously of your future, for I am old--yes, there is no denying it!--and any day I may leave you, dependent solely upon yourself."

"Do not speak like that," she answered, tenderly. "We shall be together many, many years."

"Always, if I had my way," he returned, heartily.

"But with this legacy you are superior to the fickle public. In fact, you are now a part of the capricious public, my dear," he added in a jocular tone, "and may applaud the 'heavy father,' myself, or prattle about prevailing styles while the buskined tragedian is strutting below your box. Why turn to a blind bargain? Fame is a jade, only caught after our illusions are gone and she seems not half so sweet as when pursuing her in our dreams!"

But as he spoke, with forced lightness, beneath which, however, the young girl could readily detect the vein of anxiety and regret, she was regarding him with the clear eyes of affection. His face, seamed with many lines and bearing the deeply engraved handwriting of time, spoke plainly of declining years; every lineament was eloquent with vicissitudes endured; and as she discerningly read that varied past of which her own brief career had been a part, there entered her mind a brighter picture of a tranquil life for him at last, where in old age he could exchange uncertainty and activity for security and rest. How could she refuse to do as he desired? How often since fate had wrought this change in her life had she asked herself the question?

Her work, it is true, had grown dearer to her than ever; of late she had thrown herself into her task with an ardor and earnestness lifting each portrayal to a higher plane. Is it that only with sorrow comes the fulness of art; that its golden gates are never swung entirely

open to the soul bearing no burden?

Closed to ruder buffetings, is it only to the sesame of a sad voice those portals spring magically back? But for his sake she must needs pause on the threshold of attainment, and stifle that ambition which of itself precluded consideration of a calm, uneventful existence. She was young and full of courage, but the pathos of his years smote her heart; something inexplicable had awakened her fears for him; she believed him far from well of late, although he laughed at her apprehensions and protested he had never been better in his life.

Now, reading the anxiety in his face as he watched her, she smiled reassuringly, her glance, full of love, meeting his.

"Everything shall be as you wish," she said, softly. "You know what is best!"

The manager's face lighted perceptibly, but before he could answer, the door opened, and Culver, the attorney, entered. With ruddy countenance and youthful bearing, in antithesis to the hair, silvered with white, he was one of those southern gentlemen who grow old gracefully. The law was his taskmaster; he practised from a sense of duty, but ever held that those who rushed to court were likely to repeat the experience of Voltaire, who had twice been ruined: once when he lost a law suit; the second time, when he won one! Nevertheless, people persisted in coming to Culver wantonly welcoming

unknown ills.

"Well, Miss Carew," he now exclaimed, after warmly greeting his visitors, "have you disburdened yourself of prejudice against this estate? Wealth may be a little hardship at first, but soon you won't mind it."

"Not a bit!" spoke up Barnes. "It's as easy to get used to as--poverty, and we've had plenty of that!"

"You know the other condition?" she said, half-defiantly, half-sadly. "You are to be with me always."

"How can you teach an old dog new tricks?" protested Barnes. "How can you make a fine man about town out of a 'heavy father?'"

"The 'heavy father' is my father. I never knew any other. I am glad I never did."

"Hoity-toity!" he exclaimed scoffingly, but pleased nevertheless.

"You can't put me off that way," she said, decisively, with a sudden flash in her eyes he knew too well to cross. "Either you leave the stage, too, or--"

"Of course, my dear, of course--"

"Then it's all settled you will accept the encumbrance to which you have fallen heir," resumed Culver. "Even if there had been no will in your favor, the State of Louisiana follows the French law, and the testator can under no circumstances alienate more than half his property, if he leave issue or descendants. Had the old will remained, its provisions could not have been legally carried out."

"The old will?" said Barnes. "Then there was another will?"

"One made before he was aware of your existence, Miss Carew, in favor of his ward, Ernest Saint-Prosper."

"Ernest Saint-Prosper!"

Constance's cheeks flamed crimson, and her quick start of surprise did not escape the observant lawyer. Barnes, too, looked amazed over this unexpected intelligence.

"Saint-Prosper was the marquis' ward?" he cried.

The attorney transferred his gaze from the expressive features of his fair client to the open countenance of the manager. "Yes," he said.

"And would have inherited this property but for Constance?"

"Exactly! But you knew him, Mr. Barnes?"

"He was an occupant of the chariot, sir," replied the manager, with some feeling. "We met in the Shadengo Valley; the company was in sore straits, and--and--to make a long story short!--he joined our band and traversed the continent with us. And so he was the marquis' ward! It seems almost incredible!"

"Yes," affirmed Culver; "when General Saint-Prosper, his father, died, Ernest Saint-Prosper, who was then but a boy, became the marquis' ward and a member of his household."

"Well, well, how things do come about!" ruminated Barnes. "To think he should have been the prospective heir, and Constance, the real one!"

"Where is he now?" asked the attorney, thoughtfully.

"He has gone to Mexico; enlisted! But how do you know he--"

"Had expectations? The marquis told me about a quarrel they had had; he was a staunch imperialist; the young man as firm a republican! What would be the natural outcome? They parted in bitter anger."

"And then the marquis made him his heir?" exclaimed the manager, incredulously. "How do you reconcile that?"

The attorney smiled. "Through the oddity of my client! 'Draw up my will,' said the marquis to me one day, 'leaving all my property to this republican young dog. That will cut off the distant relatives who made the sign of the cross behind my back as though I were the evil one. They expect it all; he expects nothing! It will be a rare joke. I leave them my affection--and the privilege of having masses said for my soul.' The marquis was always of a satirical temperament."

"So it seems," commented the manager. "But he changed his mind and his will again?"

"After he met Miss Carew."

"Met me!" exclaimed Constance, aroused from a maze of reflection.

"Near the cathedral! He walked and talked with you."

"That poor old man--"

"And then came here, acknowledged you as his daughter, and drew up the final document."

"That accounts for a call I had from him!" cried Barnes, telling the story of the marquis' visit. "Strange, I did not suspect something of the truth at the time," he concluded, "for his manner was certainly unusual."

A perplexed light shone in the girl's eyes; she clasped and unclasped her hands quickly, turning to the lawyer.

"Their quarrel was only a political difference?" she asked at length.

"Yes," said the other, slowly. "Saint-Prosper refused to support the fugitive king. Throughout the parliamentary government, the restoration under Louis XVIII, and the reign of King Charles X, the marquis had ever a devout faith in the divine right of monarchs. He annulled his marriage in England with your mother to marry the Duchesse D'Argens, a relative of the royal princess. But Charles abdicated and the duchesse died. All this, however, is painful to you, Miss Carew?"

"Only such as relates to my mother," she replied in a clear tone. "I suppose I should feel grateful for this fortune, but I am afraid I do not. Please go on."

Culver leaned back in his chair, his glance bent upon a discolored statue of Psyche in the court-yard. "Had the marquis attended to his garden, like Candide, or your humble servant, and eschewed the company of kings he might have been as care-free as he was wretched. His monarchs were knocked down like nine-pins. Louis XVIII was a man of straw; Charles X, a feather-top, and Louis Philippe, a toy ruler. The marquis' domestic life was as unblest as his political career. The

frail duchesse left him a progeny of scandals. These, the only offspring of the iniquitous dame, were piquantly dressed in the journals for public parade. Fancy, then, his delight in disinheriting his wife's relatives, and leaving you, his daughter, his fortune and his name!"

"His name?" she repeated, sadly. With averted face she watched the fountain in the garden. "If he had given it to my mother," she continued, "but now--I do not care for it. Her name is all I want." Her voice trembled and she exclaimed passionately: "I should rather Mr. Saint-Prosper would keep the property and I--my work! After denying my mother and deserting her, how can I accept anything from him?"

"Under the new will," said Culver, "the estate does not revert to Mr. Saint-Prosper in any event. But you might divide it with him?" he added, suddenly.

"How could I do that?" she asked, without looking up.

"Marry him!" laughed the attorney.

But the jest met with scant response, his fair client remaining motionless as a statue, while Barnes gazed at her furtively. Culver's smile gradually faded; uncertain how to proceed, realizing his humor had somehow miscarried, he was not sorry when the manager arose,

saying:

"Well, my dear, it is time we were at the theater."

"Won't you accept this nosegay from my garden, Miss Carew?" urged the lawyer in a propitiatory tone as they were leaving.

And the attorney not only accompanied them to the door, but down-stairs to the street, where he stood for a moment watching them drive down the thoroughfare. Then he slowly returned, breathing heavily--invidious contradiction of his youthful assumption!--and shaking his head, as he mounted to his room.

"Culver, you certainly put your foot in it that time!" he muttered. "How she froze at my suggestion! Has there been some passage of arms between them? Apparently! But here am I, pondering over romances with all this legal business staring me in the face!" His glance swept a chaos of declarations, bills, affidavits and claims. "Confound the musty old courthouse and the bustling Yankee lawyers who set such a disturbing pace! There is no longer gentlemanly leisure in New Orleans."

He seated himself with a sigh before a neglected brief. In the distance the towers of the cathedral could be seen, reminding the attorney of the adjacent halls of justice in the scraggy-looking square, with its turmoil, its beggars, and apple women in the lobbies;

its ancient, offensive smell, its rickety stairs, its labyrinth of passages and its Babel of tongues. Above him, however, the plaster bust of Justinian, out of those blank, sightless eyes, continued the contemplation of the garden as though turning from the complex jurisprudence of the ancients and moderns to the simple existence of butterflies and flowers.

CHAPTER II

ONLY A SHADOW

There is an aphorism to the effect that one can not spend and have; also, a saying about the whirlwind, both of which in time came home to the land baron. For several generations the Mauville family, bearing one of the proudest names in Louisiana, had held marked prestige under Spanish and French rule, while extensive plantations indicated the commercial ascendency of the patroon's ancestors. The thrift of his forefathers, however, passed lightly over Edward Mauville. Sent to Paris by his mother, a widow, who could deny him nothing, in the course of a few years he had squandered two plantations and several hundred negroes. Her death placed him in undisputed possession of the residue of the estate, when finding the exacting details of commerce irksome, in a moment of weakness, he was induced to dispose of some of his possessions to Yankee speculators who had come in with the flood of northern energy. Most of the money thus realized he placed in loose investments, while the remainder gradually disappeared in indulging his pleasures.

At this critical stage in his fortunes--or misfortunes--the patroon's legacy had seemed timely, and his trip to the North followed. But from a swarm of creditors, to a nest of anti-renters, was out of the frying-pan into the fire, hastening his return to the Crescent City,

where he was soon forced to make an assignment of the remaining property. A score of hungry lawyers hovered around the sinking estate, greedily jealous lest some one of their number should batten too gluttonously at this general collation. It was the one topic of interest in the musty, dusty courthouse until the end appeared with the following announcement in the local papers:

"Annonce! Vente importante de Nègres! Mauville estate in bankruptcy!"

And thereafter were specified the different lots of negroes to be sold.

Coincident with these disasters came news from the North regarding his supposedly immense interests in New York State. A constitutional convention had abolished all feudal tenures and freed the fields from baronial burdens. At a breath--like a house of cards--the northern heritage was swept away and about all that remained of the principality was the worthless ancient deed itself, representing one of the largest colonial grants.

But even the sale of the negroes and his other merchandise and property failed to satisfy his clamorous creditors or to pay his gambling debts. Those obligations at cards it was necessary to meet, so he moved out of his bachelor apartments, turned over his expensive furnishings and bric-à-brac to the gamblers and snapped his fingers at the over-anxious constables and lawyers.

As time went by evidence of his reverses insidiously crept into his personal appearance. He who had been the leader now clung to the tail-ends of style, and it was a novel sensation when one day he noticed a friend scrutinizing his garments much in the same critical manner that he had himself erstwhile affected. This glance rested casually on the hat; strayed carelessly to the waistcoat; wandered absently to the trousers, down one leg and up the other; superciliously jumped over the waistcoat and paused the infinitesimal part of a second on the necktie. Mauville learned in that moment how the eye may wither and humble, without giving any ostensible reason for offense. The attitude of this mincing fribble, as he danced twittingly away, was the first intimation Mauville had received that he would soon be relegated to the ranks of gay adventurers thronging the city. He who had watched his estates vanish with an unruffled countenance now became disconcerted over the width of his trousers and the shape of his hat.

His new home was in the house of an aged quadroon who had been a servant in his family many years ago--how long no one seemed to remember!--and who had been his nurse before she had received her freedom. She enjoyed the distinction of being feared in the neighborhood; her fetishes had a power no other witch's possessed, and many of the negroes would have done anything to have possessed these infallible charms, save crossing her threshold to get them. Mauville, when he found fortune slipping away from him and ruin staring him in

the face, had been glad to transfer his abode to this unhallowed place; going into hiding, as it were, until the storm should blow by, when he expected to emerge, confident as ever.

But inaction soon chafed his restless nature, and drove him forth in spite of himself from the streets in that quarter of the town where the roofs of various-colored houses formed strange geometrical figures and the windows were bright with flaring head-dresses, beneath which looked out curious visages of ebony. Returning one day from such a peregrination, he determined to end a routine of existence so humiliating to his pride.

Pausing before a doorway, the land baron looked this way and that, and seeing only the rotating eyes of a pickaninny fastened upon him, hurried through the entrance. Hanging upon the walls were red and green pods and bunches of dried herbs of unquestionable virtue belonging to the old crone's pharmacopoeia. Mauville slowly ascended the dark stairs and reached his retreat, a small apartment, with furniture of cane-work and floor covered with sea-grass; the ceiling low and the windows narrow, opening upon a miniature balcony that offered space for one and no more.

"Is dat yo', honey?" said an adoring voice on the landing.

"Yes, auntie," replied the land baron, as an old crone emerged from an ill-lighted recess and stood before him.

Now the light from the doorway fell upon her, and surely five score years were written on her curiously wrinkled face--five score, or more, for even the negroes did not profess to know how old she was. Her bent figure, watery eyes and high shrill voice bore additional testimony to her age.

"Yo's home earlier dan usual, dearie?" she resumed. "But yo' supper's all ready. Sit down here."

"I'm not hungry, auntie," he returned.

"Not hungry, honey?" she cried, laughing shrilly. "Yo' wait!" And she disappeared into an adjoining room, soon to emerge with a steaming platter, which she set on the snow-white cover of the little table. Removing the lid from the dish, she hobbled back a few steps to regard her guest with triumphant expectation. "Dat make yo' eat."

"What a cook you are, mammy!" he said, lightly. "You would give a longing tooth to satiety."

"De debil blow de fire," she answered, chuckling.

"Then the devil is a chef de cuisine. This sauce is bewitching."

"Yo' like it?" Delighted.

"Tis a spell in itself. Confess, mammy, Old Nick mixed it?"

"No, he only blow de fire," she reiterated, with a grin.

"Any one been to see me, mammy?"

"Only dat Mexican gemmen; dat gemmen been here befo' who take yo' message about de troops; when dey go from New Orleans; how many dey am!"

"You know that, auntie?" he asked quickly. "You know that I--"

"Yes, honey," she answered, shaking her head. "Yo' be berry careful, Mar's'r Edward."

"What did he want?" said the land baron, quickly.

"He gib me dis." And the crone handed her visitor a slip of paper on which a few words were written. "What dat mean?"

"It means I am going away, mammy," pushing back his chair.

"Gwine away!" she repeated. "When's yo' gwine?"

"To-morrow; perhaps to-night even; down the river, auntie!" Rising and

surveying himself in a mirror.

"How long yo' gwine away foh?"

"Perhaps forever, auntie!"

"Not foh good, Mar's'r Edward? Not foh good?" He nodded and she broke into loud wailings. "Yo's gwine and yo' old mammy'll see yo' no moh--no moh! I knows why yo's gwine, Mar's'r Edward. I's heard yo' talkin' about her in yo' sleep. But yo' stay and yo' mammy has a love-charm foh yo'; den she's yo's, foh suah."

This offer, coming from one of her uncanny reputation, would have been accepted with implicit faith by most of the dwellers in that locality, superstitious to the last degree, but Mauville laughed carelessly.

"Pshaw, mammy! Do you think I would fly from a woman? Do I look as though I needed a charm?"

"No; she mus' worship yo'!" cried the infatuated crone.

Then a change passed over her puckered face and she lifted her arms despairingly, rocking her body to and fro, while she mumbled unintelligible words which would have caused the negroes to draw away from her with awe, for the spell was on her. But the land baron only regarded her carelessly as she muttered something pertaining to spells

and omens.

"Come, auntie," he said impatiently at last, "you know I don't believe in this tom-foolery."

She turned to him vehemently. "Don't go whar yo' thinkin' ob gwine, honey," she implored. "Yo'll nebber come back, foh suah--foh suah! I see yo' lyin' dar, honey, in de dark valley--whar de mists am risin'--and I hears a bugle soundin'--and de tramp of horses. Dey am all gone, honey--and de mists come back--but yo' am dar--lying dar--de mountains around yo'--yo' am dar fo'ebber and ebber and--" Here she broke into wild sobbing and moaning, tossing her white hair with her trembling withered arms, a moving picture of an inspired dusky sibyl. Mauville shrugged his shoulders.

"We're losing time, mammy," he exclaimed. "Stop this nonsense and go pack a few things for me. I have some letters to write."

The old woman reluctantly obeyed, and the land baron penned a somewhat lengthy epistle to his one-time master in Paris, the Abbé Moneau, whose disapproval of the Anglo-Saxon encroachments--witness Louisiana!--and zeal for the colonization of the Latin races are matters of history. Having completed his epistle, the land baron placed it in the old crone's hand to mail with: "If that man calls again, tell him I'll meet him to-night," and, leaving the room, shot through the doorway, once more rapidly walking down the shabby

thoroughfare. The aged negro woman stumbled out upon the balcony and gazed after the departing figure still moaning softly to herself and shaking her head in anguish.

"Fo'ebber and ebber," she repeated in a wailing tone. Below a colored boy gazed at her in wonderment.

"What debblement am she up to now?" he said to a girl seated in a doorway. "When de old witch am like dat--"

"Come in dar, yo' black imp!" And a vigorous arm pulled the lad abruptly through the opening. "Ef she sees yo', she can strike yo' dead, foh suah!"

The crone could no longer distinguish Mauville--her eyes were nearly sightless--but she continued to look in the direction he had taken, sobbing as before: "Fo'ebber and ebber! Fo'ebber and ebber!"

Once more upon a fashionable thoroughfare, the land baron's footstep relaxed and he relapsed into his languorous, indolent air. The shadows of twilight were darkening the streets and a Caribbee-scented breeze was wafted from the gulf across the city. It swept through the broad avenues and narrow highways, and sighed among the trees of the old garden. Seating himself absently on one of the public benches, Mauville removed his hat to allow the cool air to fan his brow. Presently he moved on; up Canal Street, where the long rows of

gas lights now gleamed through the foliage; thence into a side thoroughfare, as dark as the other street was bright, pausing before a doorway, illumined by a single yellow flame that flickered in the draft and threatened to leave the entrance in total obscurity. Mounting two flights of stairs, no better lighted than the hall below, the land baron reached a doorway, where he paused and knocked. In answer to his summons a slide was quickly slipped back, and through the aperture floated an alcoholic breath.

"Who is it?"

"A Knight of the Golden Square," said the caller, impatiently. "Open the door."

The man obeyed and the land baron was admitted to the hall of an organization which had its inception in Texas; a society not unlike the Secret Session Legation of the Civil War, having for its object the overthrow of the government, the carrying of mails and despatches and other like business. Here was gathered a choice aggregation of Mexican sympathizers, a conclave hostile to the North. Composed of many nationalities, the polished continental adventurer rubbed shoulders with the Spanish politicians; the swarthy agents of Santa Anna brushed against the secret enemies of northern aggression. A small bar, unpretentious but convenient, occupied a portion of one end of the room, and a brisk manipulator of juleps presided over this popular corner.

Half-disdainfully, the land baron mingled with the heterogeneous assembly; half-ironically, his eye swept the group at the bar--the paid spy, the needy black-sheep; the patriot, the swashbuckler; men with and without a career. As Mauville stepped forward, a quiet, dark-looking man, obviously a Mexican, not without a certain distinguished carriage, immediately approached the newcomer.

"You have come? Good!" he said, and drew Mauville aside. They conversed in low tones, occasionally glancing about them at the others.

In the hall below the rhythm of a waltz now made itself heard, and the land baron, having received certain papers which committed him to a hazardous service, prepared to leave.

"Here's luck!" said a man on his left, raising his glass. At these words several of the company turned.

"Send it south!" roared a Texan Furioso, emptying his tumbler.

"Send it south!" echoed the others, and "south" the fragrant juleps were "sent," as the land baron unceremoniously tore himself away from the group.

"They say the floods are rising," said the man with whom Mauville had

conferred, at the door.

"All the better if the river's running wild!" answered the other. "It will be easier running the guard."

"Yes," returned the Mexican, extending his hand, with a smile; "in this case, there's safety in danger!"

"That's reassuring!" replied the land baron, lightly, as he descended the stairs.

On reaching the floor below he was afforded a view through an open door into a large room, lighted with many lamps, where a quadroon dance, or "society ball," was in progress. After a moment's hesitation he entered and stood in the glare, watching the waltzers. Around the wall were dusky chaperons, guarding their charges with the watchfulness of old dowagers protecting their daughters from the advances of younger sons. Soft eyes flashed invitingly, graceful figures passed, and the revelry momentarily attracted Mauville, as he followed the movements of the waltzers and heard the strains of music. Impulsively he approached a young woman whose complexion was as light as his own and asked her to dance. The next moment they were gliding to the dreamy rhythm around the room.

By a fatal trick of imagination, his thoughts wandered to the dark-haired girl he had met in the Shadengo Valley. If this now were

she, the partner he had so unceremoniously summoned to his side. How light were her feet; what poetry of motion was her dancing; what pleasure the abandonment to which she had resigned herself! Involuntarily he clasped more tightly the slender waist, and the dark eyes, moved by that palpable caress, looked not unkindly into his own. But at the glance he experienced a strange repulsion and started, as if awakening from a fevered sleep, abruptly stopping in the dance, his arm falling to his side. The girl looked at him half-shyly, half-boldly, and the very beauty of her eyes--the deep, lustrous orbs of a quadroon--smote him mockingly. He felt as though some light he sought shone far beyond his ken; a light he saw, but could never reach; ever before him, but always receding.

"Monsieur is tired?" said the girl, in a puzzled tone.

"Yes," he answered bluntly, leading her to a seat. "Good-night."

"Good-night," she replied, following his retreating figure with something like regret.

The evening bells, distinct and mysterious, were sounding as he emerged from New Orleans' Mabille, and their crystalline tones, rising and falling on the solemn night, brought to mind his boyhood. Pictures long forgotten passed before him, as his footsteps led him far from the brightly-lighted streets to a sequestered thoroughfare that lay peacefully on the confines of the busy city; a spot inviting

rest from the turmoil yonder and in accord with the melancholy vibrations of the bells. He stood, unseen in the shadow of great trees, before a low rambling mansion; not so remote but that the perfume from the garden was wafted to him over the hedge.

"A troubadour!" he said scornfully to himself. "Edward Mauville sighing at a lady's window like some sentimental serenader! There's a light yonder. Now to play my despairing part, I must watch for her image. If I were some one else, I should say my heart beats faster than usual. She comes--the fair lady! Now the curtain's down. All that may be seen is her shadow. So, despairing lover, hug that shadow to your breast!"

He plucked a rose from a bush in her garden, laughing at himself the while for doing so, and as he moved away he repeated with conviction:

"A shadow! That is all she ever could have been to me!"

CHAPTER III

FROM GARRET TO GARDEN

"Celestina, what do you think this is?" Waving something that crackled in mid air.

"A piece of paper," said Celestina from her place on the hearth.

"Paper!" scoffed Straws. "It's that which Horace calls a handmaid, if you know how to use it; a mistress, if you do not--money! It is--success, the thing which wrecks more lives than cyclones, fires and floods! We were happy enough before this came, weren't we, Celestina?"

The girl nodded her head, a look of deep anxiety in her eyes.

"Oh, why did the critics so damn the book it fairly leaped to popularity!" went on the bard. "Why did they advise me to learn a trade? to spoil no more reams of paper? To spoil reams of paper and get what--this little bit in return!"

"Is it so very much money?" asked Celestina.

"An enormous amount--one thousand dollars! And the worst of it is, my

publishers write there may be more to come."

"Well," said the child, after a long, thoughtful pause, "why don't you give it away?"

"Hum! Your suggestion, my dear--"

"But, perhaps, no one would take it?" interrupted Celestina.

"Perhaps they wouldn't!" agreed Straws, rubbing his hands. "So, under the circumstances, let us consider how we may cultivate some of the vices of the rich. It is a foregone conclusion, set down by the philosophers, that misery assails riches. The philosophers were never rich and therefore they know. Besides, they are unanimous on the subject. It only remains to make the best of it and cultivate the vanities of our class. Where shall I begin? 'Riches betray man into arrogance,' saith Addison. Therefore will I be arrogant; while you, my dear, shall be proud."

"That will be lovely!" assented Celestina, as a matter of habit. She went to the bed and began smoothing the sheets deftly.

"My dear!" expostulated Straws. "You mustn't do that."

"Not make the bed!" she asked, in surprise.

"No."

"Nor bring your charcoal?"

"No."

"Nor wash your dishes?"

"Certainly not!"

Celestina dropped on the floor, a picture of misery.

"Too bad, isn't it?" commented Straws. "But it can't be helped, can it?"

"No," she said, shaking her head, wofully; "it can't be helped! But why--why did you publish it?"

"Just what the critics asked, my dear! Why? Who knows? Who can tell why the gods invented madness? But it's done; for bad, or worse!"

"For bad, or worse!" she repeated, gazing wistfully toward the rumpled bed.

"If somebody tells you fine feathers don't make fine birds, don't believe him," continued the poet. "It's envy that speaks! But what do

you suppose I have here?" Producing a slip of paper from his vest pocket. "No; it's not another draft! An advertisement! Listen: 'Mademoiselle de Castiglione's select seminary. Young ladies instructed in the arts of the bon ton. Finesse, repose, literature! Fashions, etiquette, languages! P. S. Polkas a specialty!' Celestina, your destiny lies at Mademoiselle de Castiglione's. They will teach you to float into a drawing room--but you won't forget the garret? They will instruct you how to sit on gilt chairs--you will think sometimes of the box, or the place by the hearth? You will become a mistress of the piano--'By the Coral Strands I Wander,' 'The Sweet Young Bachelor'--but I trust you will not learn to despise altogether the attic pipe?"

"You mean," said Celestina, slowly, her face expressing bewilderment, "I must go away somewhere?"

Straws nodded. "That's it; somewhere!"

The girl's eyes flashed; her little hands clenched. "I won't; I won't!"

"Then that's the end on't!" retorted the bard. "I had bought you some new dresses, a trunk with your name on it, and had made arrangements with Mademoiselle de Castiglione (who had read 'Straws' Strophes'), but perhaps I could give the dresses away to some other little girl who will be glad to drink at the Pierian--I mean, the

Castiglione--spring."

Celestina's eyes were an agony of jealousy; not that she was mercenary, or cared for the dresses, but that Straws should give them to another little girl. Her pride, however, held her in check and she drew herself up with composure.

"That would be nice--for the other little girl!" she said.

"The only difficulty is," resumed Straws, "there isn't any other little girl."

At that, Celestina gave a glad cry and flew to him, throwing her arms around his neck.

"Oh, I will go anywhere you want!" she exclaimed.

"Get on your bonnet then--before you change your mind, my dear!"

"And aunt?" asked Celestina, lingering doubtfully on the threshold.

"Your aunt, as you call that shriveled-up shrew, consented at once," answered Straws. "Her parental heart was filled with thanksgiving at the prospect of one less mouth to fill. Go and say good-by, however, to the old harridan; I think she has a few conventional tears to shed. But do not let her prolong her grief inordinately, and meet me at the

front door."

A few moments later, Straws and the child, hand-in-hand, started on their way to the Castiglione temple of learning and culture. If Celestina appeared thoughtful, even sad, the poet was never so merry, and sought to entertain the abstracted girl with sparkling chit-chat about the people they met in the crowded streets. A striking little man was a composer of ability, whose operas, "Cosimo," "Les Pontons de Cadiz," and other works had been produced at the Opéra Comique in Paris. He was now director of the French opera in New Orleans and had brought out the charming Mademoiselle Capriccioso and the sublime Signor Staccato. The lady by his side, a dark brunette with features that were still beautiful, was the nimble-footed Madame Feu-de-joie, whose shapely limbs and graceful motions had delighted two generations and were like to appeal to a third. Men who at twenty had thrown Feu-de-joie posies, now bald but young as ever, tossed her roses.

"I don't like that lady," said Celestina, emphatically, when the dancer had passed on, after petting her and kissing her on the cheek.

"Now, it's curious," commented the bard, "but your sex never did."

"Do men like her?" asked the child, with premature penetration.

"They did; they do; they will!" answered Straws, epigrammatically.

"Do you like her?"

"Oh, that's different! Poets, you know, are the exception to any rule."

"Why?"

"Because--Really, my dear, you ask too many questions!"

Although Straws and Celestina had left the house early in the day, it was noon before they reached the attractive garden, wherein was sequestered the "select seminary."

In this charming prison, whose walls were overrun with flowering vines, and whose cells were pretty vestal bowers, entered the bard and the young girl, to be met on the front porch by the wardeness herself, a mite of a woman, with wavy yellow hair, fine complexion and washed-out blue eyes. Sensitive almost to shyness, Mademoiselle de Castiglione appeared more adapted for the seclusion of the veil in the Ursuline Church than for the varied responsibilities of a young ladies' institute. At the approach of the poet, she turned, looked startled, but finally came forward bravely.

"Oh, I've read it again, Mr. Straws!" she exclaimed, impetuously.

"What?" he returned, sternly, pausing at the foot of the steps.

"Your--your lovely Strophes!" she continued, timidly.

The bard frowned. "All great men profess to scowl at flattery," thought Straws. "She will have but a poor opinion of me, if I do not appear an offended Hector!"

"Mademoiselle, I excessively dislike compliments," he began aloud, but having gone thus far, his courage and lack of chivalry failed him in the presence of her dismay; he forgot his greatness, and hastened to add, with an ingratiating smile: "Except when delivered by such a charming person!"

"Oh, Mr. Straws!"

"This, Mademoiselle," resumed the bard, "is the young girl I spoke about. Her mother," he added in a low voice, "was a beautiful quadroon; her father"--here Straws mentioned a name. The wardeness flushed furiously. "Father died; always meant to make it right; didn't; crime of good intentions! Virago of an aunt; regular termagant; hates the girl! Where was a home to be found for her? Where"--gazing around him--"save this--Eden? Where a mother--save in one whose heart is the tenderest?"

Diplomatic Straws! Impulsively the wardeness crossed to Celestina; her blue eyes beamed with sentiment and friendliness. "I will give her my

personal attention," she said. And then to the young girl: "We will be friends, won't we?"

"Yes," replied Celestina, slowly, after a moment's discreet hesitation. She was glad the other did not kiss her like Feu-de-joie.

"I always like," said the wardeness, "to feel my little girls are all my little friends."

"Mademoiselle," exclaimed the bard, "I'll--I'll dedicate my next volume of poems to you!"

"Really, Mr. Straws!"

"For every kindness to her, you shall have a verse," he further declared.

"Then your dedication would be as long as Homer!" she suddenly flashed out, her arm around the child.

Straws looked at her quickly. It was too bad of him! And that borrowed Don Juan smile! Nothing could excuse it.

Castiglione busied herself with Celestina's ribbons. "Whoever did tie that bow-knot?" she observed.

"Good-by, Celestina," said Straws.

Celestina put her arms gravely about his neck and he pressed his lips to her cheek. Then he strode quickly toward the gate. Just before passing out, he looked back. The wardeness had finished adjusting the ribbon and was contemplatively inspecting it. Celestina, as though unconscious of the attention, was gazing after the poet, and when he turned into the road, her glance continued to rest upon the gate.

CHAPTER IV

"THE BEST OF LIFE"

On a certain evening about a month later, the tropical rains had flooded the thoroughfares, until St. Charles Street needed but a Rialto and a little imagination to convert it into a watery highway of another Venice, while as for Canal Street, its name was as applicable as though it were spanned by a Bridge of Sighs. In the narrow streets the projecting eaves poured the water from the roof to the sidewalks, deluging the pedestrians. These minor thoroughfares were tributary to the main avenues and gushed their rippling currents into them, as streams supply a river, until the principal streets flowed swiftly with the dirty water that choked their gutters. The rain splashed and spattered on the sidewalks, fairly flooding out the fruit venders and street merchants who withstood the deluge for a time and then were forced to vanish with their portable stores. The cabby, phlegmatic to wind and weather, sat on his box, shedding the moisture from his oil-skin coat and facing a cloud of steam which presumably concealed a horse.

The dark night and the downpour made the cafés look brighter. Umbrellas flitted here and there, skilfully piloted beneath swinging signs and low balconies, evading awning posts and high hats as best they might. There were as many people out as usual, but they were

hurrying to their destinations, even the languid creole beauty, all lace and alabaster, moved with the sprightliness of a maid of Gotham.

Straws, editor and rhymster, was seated on the semi-Oriental, semi-French gallery of the little café, called the Veranda, sipping his absinthe, smoking a cheroot and watching the rain drip from the roof of the balcony, spatter on the iron railing and form a shower bath for the pedestrians who ventured from beneath the protecting shelter. Before him was paper, partly covered with well-nigh illegible versification, and a bottle of ink, while a goose-quill, tool of the tuneful Nine, was expectantly poised in mid air.

"Confound it!" he said to himself. "I can't write in the attic any more, since Celestina has gone, and apparently I can't write away from it. Since she left, the dishes haven't been washed; my work has run down at the heels, and everything is going to the dogs generally. And now this last thing has upset me quite. 'In the twinkling of an eye,' says the sacred Book. But I must stop thinking, or I'll never complete this poem. Now to make my mind a blank; a fitting receptacle to receive inspiration!"

The bard's figure swayed uncertainly on the stool. In the lively race through a sonnet, it was often, of late, a matter of doubt with Straws, whether Bacchus or Calliope would prevail at the finish, and to-night the jocund god had had a perceptible start. "Was ever a poet so rhyme-fuddled?" muttered the impatient versifier. "An inebriating

trade, this poetizing!"--and he reached for the absinthe. "If I am not careful, these rhymes will put me under the table!"

"Nappy, eh?" said a voice at his elbow, as a dripping figure approached, deposited his hat on one chair and himself in another. The newcomer had a long, Gothic face and a merry-wise expression.

The left hand of the poet waved mechanically, imposing silence; the quill dived suddenly to paper, trailed twice across it, and then was cast aside, as Straws looked up.

"Yes," he replied to the other's interrogation. "It's all on account of Celestina's leaving me. You ought to see my room. Even a poet's soul revolts against it. So what can I do, save make my home amid convivial haunts?" The poet sighed. "And you, Phazma; how are you feeling?"

"Sober as a judge!"

"Then you shall judge of this last couplet," exclaimed Straws quickly. "It has cost me much effort. The editor wanted it. It seemed almost too sad a subject for my halting muse. There are some things which should be sacred even from us, Phazma. But what is to be done when the editor-in-chief commands? 'Ours not to reason why!' The poem is a monody on the tragedy at the theater."

"At the St. Charles?" said Phazma, musingly. "As I passed, it was closed. It seemed early for the performance to be over. Yet the theater was dark; all the lights had gone out."

"More than the lights went out," answered Straws, gravely; "a life went out!"

"I don't exactly--Oh, you refer to Miss Carew's farewell?"

"No; to Barnes'!"

"Barnes'!" exclaimed his surprised listener.

"Yes; he is dead; gone out like the snuff of a candle! Died in harness, before the footlights!"

"During the performance!" cried the wondering Phazma. "Why, only this afternoon I met him, apparently hale and hearty, and now--you tell me he has paid the debt of nature?"

"As we must all pay it," returned Straws. "He acted as if he were dazed while the play was in progress and I could not but notice it, standing in the wings. The prompter spoke of it to me. 'I don't know what is the matter with Mr. Barnes,' he said, 'I have had to keep throwing him his lines.' Even Miss Carew rallied him gently between acts on his subdued manner.

"'This is our last performance together,' he said absently. She gave him a reproachful look and he added, quickly: 'Do I appear gloomy, my dear? I never felt happier.'

"At the end of the second act he seemed to arouse himself, when she, as Isabella, said: 'I'll fit his mind to death, for his soul's rest.'
He gazed at her long and earnestly, his look caressing her wherever she moved. Beginning the prison scene with spirit, he had proceeded to,

> "'Reason thus with life;
> If I do lose thee, I do lose a thing
> That none but fools would keep--'

When suddenly he threw up his arms and fell upon the stage, his face toward the audience. With a cry I shall never forget, Miss Carew rushed to him and took his head in her arms, gazing at him wildly, and calling to him piteously. The curtain went down, but nothing could be done, and life quickly ebbed. Once, only, his lips moved: 'Your mother--there!--where the play never ends!' and it was over."

"It is like a romance," said Phazma, finally, at the conclusion of this narration.

"Say, rather, reality! The masque is over! In that final sleep Jack

Pudding lies with Roscius; the tragedian does not disdain the mummer, and beautiful Columbine, all silver spangles and lace, is company for the clown. 'Tis the only true republic, Phazma; death's Utopia!"

"But to think he should have died with those words of the poet on his lips?"

"A coincidence!" answered Straws. "No more notable than the death of Edmund Kean, who, when he reached the passage 'Farewell, Othello's occupation's gone!' fell back unconscious; or that of John Palmer, who, after reciting 'There is another and a better world,' passed away without a pang."

A silence fell between the two poets; around them shadows appeared and vanished. Phazma finished his syrup and arose.

"Don't go," said Straws. "My own thoughts are poor company. Recite some of your madrigals, that's a good fellow! What a wretched night! These rain-drops are like the pattering feet of the invisible host. Some simple song, Phazma!"

"As many as you please!" cried his flattered brother-bard. "What shall it be?"

"One of your Rhymes for Children. Your 'Boy's Kingdom,' beginning:

"When I was young, I dreamed of knights
And dames with silken trains."

"Thou shalt have it, mon ami!"

And Phazma gaily caught up the refrain, while Straws beat time to the tinkling measures.

* * * * *

The last entry in the date-book, or diary, of Barnes seems curiously significant as indicating a knowledge that his end was near. For the first time in the volume he rambles on in a reminiscent mood about his boyhood days:

"The first bit of good fortune I ever enjoyed was when as a lad in sweeping a crossing in the neighborhood of the Strand I found a bright, shining sovereign. How tightly I grasped it in my little fist that night when I slept in a doorway! I dared not trust it in my pocket. The next night I walked to the ticket-seller at Drury Lane, and demanded a seat down stairs. 'Gallery seats sold around the corner,' said this imposing gentleman with a prodigious frown, and, abashed, I slunk away. My dream of being near the grand people vanished and I climbed once more to my place directly under the roof.

"My next bit of good fortune happened in this wise. Sheridan, the

playwright-orator, attracted my attention on Piccadilly one day, and, for the delight of gazing upon him, I followed. When he stopped, I stopped; when he advanced, I did likewise. I felt that I was treading in the footsteps of a king. Suddenly he paused, wheeled about and confronted me, a raw-boned, ragged, awkward lad of fourteen. 'What one of my creditors has set you following me?' he demanded. 'None, sir,' I stammered. 'I only wanted to look at the author of "The Rivals."' He appeared much amused and said: 'Egad! So you are a patron of the drama, my boy?' I muttered something in the affirmative. He regarded my appearance critically. 'I presume you would not be averse to genteel employment, my lad?' he asked. With that he scribbled a moment and handed me a note to the property man of Drury Lane. My heart was too full; I had no words to thank him. The tears were in my eyes, which, noting, he remarked, with an assumption of sternness: 'Are you sure, boy, you are not a bailiff in disguise?' At this I laughed and he left me. The note procured me an engagement as errand boy at the stage-door and later I rose to the dignity of scene-shifter. How truly typical of this man's greatness, to help lift a homeless lad out of the gutters of London town!

"But I am rambling on as though writing an autobiography, to be read when I am gone--"

Here the entry ceases and the rest of the pages in the old date-book are blank.

CHAPTER V

THE LAWYER'S TIDINGS

The sudden and tragic death of Constance's foster-father--which occurred virtually as narrated by Straws--set a seal of profound sadness on the heart of the young girl. "Good sir, adieu!" she had said in the nunnery scene and the eternal parting had shortly followed. Her affection for the old manager had been that of a loving daughter; the grief she should have experienced over the passing of the marquis was transferred to the memory of one who had been a father through love's kinship. In the far-away past, standing at the bier of her mother, the manager it was who had held her childish hand, consoling her and sharing her affliction, and, in those distant but unforgotten days of trouble, the young girl and the homeless old man became all in all to each other.

Years had rolled by; the child that prattled by his side became the stately girl, but the hand-clasp at that grave had never been relinquished. She could not pretend to mourn the death of the marquis, her own father; had he not ever been dead to her; as dead as the good wife (or bad wife) of that nobleman; as dead as Gross George, and all the other honored and dishonored figures of that misty past? But Barnes' death was the abrupt severing of ties, strengthened by years of tender association, and, when his last summons came, she felt

herself truly alone.

In an old cemetery, amid the crumbling bricks, Barnes was buried, his sealed tomb above ground bearing in its inscription the answer to the duke's query: "Thy Best of Life is Sleep." After the manager's death and Constance's retirement from the stage, it naturally followed that the passengers of the chariot became separated. Mrs. Adams continued to play old woman parts throughout the country, remaining springy and buoyant to the last. Susan transferred herself and her talents to another stock company performing in New Orleans, while Kate procured an engagement with a traveling organization. Adonis followed in her train. It had become like second nature to quarrel with Kate, and at the mere prospect of separation, he forthwith was driven to ask her for her hand, and was accepted--on probation, thus departing in leading strings. Hawkes, melancholy as of old, drifted into a comic part in a "variety show," acquiring new laurels as a dry comedian of the old school. But he continued to live alone in the world, mournfully sufficient unto himself.

Constance remained in New Orleans. There the old manager had found his final resting place and she had no definite desire to go elsewhere. Adrift in the darkness of the present, the young girl was too perplexed to plan for the future. So she remained in the house Barnes had rented shortly before his death. An elderly gentlewoman of fallen fortunes, to whom this semi-rural establishment belonged, Constance retained as a companion, passing her time quietly, soberly, almost in

solitude. This mansion, last remnant of its owner's earthly estate, was roomy and spacious, nestling among the oranges and inviting seclusion with its pretentious wall surrounding the grounds.

The old-fashioned gentlewoman, poor and proud, was a fitting figure in that ancient house, where in former days gay parties had assembled. But now the principal callers at the old house were the little fat priest, with a rosy smile, who looked after the aged lady's soul, of which she was most solicitous in these later days, and the Count de Propriac, who came ostensibly to see the elderly woman and chat about genealogy and extraction, but was obviously not unmindful of the presence of the young girl nor averse to seeking to mitigate her sorrow. Culver, the lawyer, too, came occasionally, to talk about her affairs, but often her mind turned impatiently from figures and markets to the subtle rhythm of Shakespeare. She regretted having left the stage, feeling the loneliness of this simple existence; yet averse to seeking diversion, and shunning rather than inviting society. As the inert hours crept by, she longed for the forced wakefulness and stir of other days--happy days of insecurity; fleeting, joyous days, gone now beyond recall!

But while she was striving to solve these new problems of her life they were all being settled for her by Fate, that arrogant meddler. Calling one morning, Culver, nosegay in hand, was obliged to wait longer than usual and employed the interval in casually examining his surroundings--and, incidentally, himself. First, with the vanity of

youngish old gentlemen, he gazed into a tall mirror, framed in the fantastic style of the early Venetians; a glass which had belonged to the marquis and had erstwhile reflected the light beauty of his noble spouse. Pausing about as long as it would have taken a lady to adjust a curl, he peeped into a Dutch cabinet of ebony and mother-of-pearl and was studying a charming creature painted on ivory, whose head like that of Bluebeard's wife was subsequently separated from her lovely shoulders, when a light footstep behind him interrupted his scrutiny. Turning, he greeted the young girl, and, with stately gallantry, presented the nosegay.

"How well you are looking!" he said. "Though there might be a little more color, perhaps, like some of these flowers. If I were a doctor, I should prescribe: Less cloister; more city!"

She took the flowers, meeting his kindly gaze with a faint smile.

"Most patients would like such prescriptions," he went on. "I should soon become a popular society physician."

But although he spoke lightly, his manner was partly forced and he regarded her furtively. Their brief acquaintance had awakened in him an interest, half-paternal, half-curious. Women were an unknown, but beautiful quantity; from the vantage point of a life of single blessedness, he vaguely, but quixotically placed them in the same category with flowers, and his curiosity was no harsher than that of a

gardener studying some new variety of bud or blossom. Therefore he hesitated in what he was about to say, shifting in his chair uneasily when they were seated, but finally coming to the point with:

"Have you read the account of the engagement between the Mexican and the American forces at Vera Cruz?"

"No; not yet," she admitted.

"Nor the list of--of casualties?" he continued, hesitatingly.

"The casualties!" she repeated. "Why--"

"Saint-Prosper has no further interest in the marquis' sous," he said quickly.

She gazed straight before her, calm and composed. This absence of any exhibition of feeling reassured the attorney.

"He is--dead?" she asked quietly.

"Yes."

"How did he die?"

"Gallantly," replied the caller, now convinced she had no interest in

the matter, save that of a mere acquaintance. "His death is described in half a column. You see he did not live in vain!"

"Was he--killed in battle?"

"In a skirmish. His company was sent to break up a band of guerilla rancheros at Antigua. They ambushed him; he drove them out of the thicket but fell--You have dropped your flowers. Allow me!--at the head of his men."

"At the head of his men!" She drew in her breath.

"There passed the last of an ill-fated line," said the lawyer, reflectively. "Poor fellow! He started with such bright prospects, graduating from the military college with unusual honors. Ambitious, light-hearted, he went to Africa to carve out a name in the army. But fate was against him. The same ship that took him over carried back, to the marquis, the story of his brother's disgrace--"

"His brother's disgrace!" she exclaimed.

Culver nodded. "He sold a French stronghold in Africa, Miss Carew."

Had the attorney been closely observing her he would have noticed the sudden look of bewilderment that crossed her face. She stared at him with her soul in her eyes.

"Ernest Saint-Prosper's--brother?"

The turmoil of her thoughts held her as by a spell; in the disruption of a fixed conclusion her brain was filled with new and poignant reflections. Unconsciously she placed a nervous hand upon his arm.

"Then Ernest Saint-Prosper who was--killed in Mexico was not the traitor?"

"Certainly not!" exclaimed Culver, quickly, "Owing to the disgrace, I am sure, more than to any other reason, he bade farewell to his country--and now lies unmourned in some mountain ravine. It is true the marquis quarreled with him, disliking not a little the young man's republican ideas, but--my dear young lady!--you are ill?"

"No, no!" she returned, hastily, striving to maintain her self-possession. "How--do you know this?"

"Through the marquis, himself," he replied, somewhat uneasy beneath her steady gaze. "He told me the story in order to protect the estate from any possible pretensions on the part of the traitor. The renegade was reported dead, but the marquis, nevertheless remained skeptical. He did not believe in the old saw about the devil being dead. 'Le diable lives always,' he said."

The visitor observed a perceptible change in the young girl, just what he could not define, but to him it seemed mostly to lie in her eyes where something that baffled him looked out and met his glance.

"His brother was an officer in the French army?" she asked, as though forcing herself to speak.

"Yes; ten years older than Ernest Saint-Prosper, he had already made a career for himself. How eagerly, then, must the younger brother have looked forward to meeting him; to serving with one who, in his young eyes, was all that was brave and noble! What a bitter awakening from the dream! It is not those we hate who can injure us most--only those we love can stab us so deeply!"

Mechanically she answered the lawyer, and, when he prepared to leave, the hand, given him at parting, was as cold as ice.

"Remember," he said, admonishingly; "less cloister, more city!"

Some hours later, the old lady, dressed in her heavy silk and brocade and with snow-white hair done up in imposing fashion, rapped on Constance's door, but received no answer. Knocking again, with like result, she entered the room, discovering the young girl on the bed, her cheeks tinted like the rose, her eyes with no gleam of recognition in them, and her lips moving, uttering snatches of old plays. Taking her hand, the old lady found it hot and dry.

"Bless me!" she exclaimed. "She is down with a fever." And at once prepared a simple remedy which soon silenced the babbling lips in slumber, after which she sent for the doctor.

CHAPTER VI

THE COUNCIL OF WAR

"Adjutant, tell Colonel Saint-Prosper I wish to see him."

The adjutant saluted and turned on his heel, while General Scott bent over the papers before him, studying a number of rough pencil tracings. Absorbed in his task, the light of two candles on the table brought into relief, against the dark shadows, a face of rugged character and marked determination. Save for a slight contraction of the brow, he gave no evidence of the mental concentration he bestowed upon the matter in hand, which was to lead to the culmination of the struggle and to vindicate the wisdom and boldness of his policy.

"You sent for me, General?"

An erect, martial figure stood respectfully at the entrance of the tent.

"Yes," said the General, pushing the papers from him. "I have been studying your drawings of the defensive works at San Antonio Garita and find them entirely comprehensive. A council of officers has been called, and perhaps it will be as well for you to remain."

"At what time shall I be here, General?"

"It is about time now," answered the commander-in-chief, consulting his watch. "You have quite recovered from your wounds?" he added, kindly.

"Yes, thank you, General."

"I see by the newspapers you were reported dead. If your friends read that it will cause them needless anxiety. You had better see that the matter is corrected."

"It is hardly worth while," returned the young man, slowly.

The commanding general glanced at him in some surprise. "A strange fellow!" he thought. "Has he reasons for wishing to be considered dead? However, that is none of my business. At any rate, he is a good soldier." And, after a moment, he continued: "Cerro Gordo was warm work, but there is warmer yet in store for us. Only Providence, not the Mexicans, can stop us. But here are the officers," as General Pillow, Brevet-General Twiggs and a number of other officers entered.

The commander-in-chief proceeded to give such information as he had, touching the approaches to the city. Many of the officers favored operating against San Antonio Garita, others attacking Chapultepec. Saint-Prosper, when called on, stated that the ground before the San

Antonio gate was intersected by many irrigating ditches and that much of the approach was under water.

"Then you would prefer storming a fortress to taking a ditch?" said one of the generals, satirically.

"A series of ditches," replied the other.

"Colonel Saint-Prosper is right," exclaimed the commanding general. "I had already made up my mind. Let it be the western gate, then."

And thus was brought to a close one of the most memorable councils of war, for it determined the fate of the City of Mexico.

Saint-Prosper looked older than when seen in New Orleans, as though he had endured much in that brief but hard campaign. His wound had incapacitated him for only a few months, and in spite of the climate and a woful lack of medical attendance and nourishing supplies, his hardy constitution stood him in such stead he was on his feet and in the saddle, while his comrades languished and died in the fierce heat of the temporary hospitals. His fellow-officers knew him as a fearless soldier, but a man reticent about himself, who made a confidant of no one. Liked for his ready, broad military qualities, it was a matter of comment, nevertheless, that no one knew anything about him except that he had served in the French army and was highly esteemed by General Scott as a daring and proficient engineer.

One evening shortly before the skirmish of Antigua, a small Mexican town had been ransacked, where were found cattle, bales of tobacco, pulque and wine. At the rare feast which followed a veteran drank to his wife; a young man toasted his sweetheart, and a third, with moist eyes, sang the praises of his mother. In the heart of the enemy's land, amid the uncertainties of war, remembrance carried them back to their native soil, rugged New England, the hills of Vermont, the prairies of Illinois, the blue grass of Kentucky.

"Saint-Prosper!" they cried, calling on him, when the festivities were at their height.

"To you, gentlemen," he replied, rising, glass in hand. "I drink to your loved ones!"

"To your own!" cried a young man, flushed with the wine.

Saint-Prosper gazed around that rough company, brave hearts softened to tenderness, and, lifting his canteen, said, after a moment's hesitation:

"To a princess on a tattered throne!"

They looked at him in surprise. Who was this adventurer who toasted princesses? The Mexican war had brought many soldiers of fortune and

titled gentlemen from Europe to the new world, men who took up the cause more to be fighting than that they cared what the struggle was about. Was the "tattered throne" Louis Philippe's chair of state, torn by the mob in the Tuileries? And what foreign princess was the lady of the throne? But they took up the refrain promptly, good-naturedly, and a chorus rolled out:

"To the princess!"

Little they knew she was but a poor stroller; an "impudent, unwomanish, graceless monster," according to Master Prynne.

After leaving the commanding general's tent, Saint-Prosper retired to rest in that wilderness which had once been a monarch's pleasure grounds. Now overhead the mighty cypresses whispered their tales of ancient glory and faded renown; the wind waved those trailing beards, hoary with age; a gathering of venerable giants, murmuring the days when the Aztec monarch had once held courtly revels under the grateful shadows of their branches. The moaning breeze seemed the wild chant of the Indian priest in honor of the war-god of Anahuac. It told of battles to come and conflicts which would level to the dust the descendants of the conquerors of that ill-starred country. And so the soldier finally fell asleep, with that requiem ringing in his ears.

When daybreak again penetrated the mountain recesses and fell upon the valley, Saint-Prosper arose to shake off a troubled slumber. An

unhealthy mist hung over the earth, like a miasma, and the officer shivered as he walked in that depressing and noxious atmosphere. It lay like a deleterious veil before the glades where myrtles mingled with the wild limes. It concealed from view a cross, said to have been planted by Cortez--the cross he worshiped because of its resemblance to the hilt of a sword!--and enveloped the hoary trees that were old when Montezuma was a boy or when Marina was beloved by the mighty free-booter.

The shade resting on the valley appeared that of a mighty, virulent hand. Out of the depths arose a flock of dark-hued birds, soaring toward the morbific fog; not moving like other winged creatures, with harmony of motion, but rising without unity, and filling the vale with discordant sounds. Nowhere could these sable birds have appeared more unearthly than in the "dark valley," as it was called by the natives, where the mists moved capriciously, yet remained persistently within the circumference of this natural cauldron, now falling like a pall and again hovering in mid air. Suddenly the uncanny birds vanished among the trees as quickly as they had arisen, and there was something mysterious about their unwarranted disappearance and the abrupt cessation of clamorous cries.

While viewing this somber scene, Saint-Prosper had made his way to a little adobe house which the natives had built near the trail that led through the valley. As he approached this hut he encountered a dismal but loquacious sentinel, tramping before the partly opened door.

"This is chilly work, guard?" said the young man, pausing.

"Yis, Colonel," replied the soldier, apparently grateful for the interruption; "it's a hot foight I prefer to this cool dooty."

"Whom are you guarding?" continued the officer.

"A spy, taken in the lines a few days ago. He's to be executed this morning at six. But I don't think he will moind that, for it's out of his head he is, with the malaria."

"He should have had medical attendance," observed the officer, stepping to the door.

"Faith, they'll cure him at daybreak," replied the guard. "It's a medicine that niver fails."

Saint-Prosper pushed open the door. The interior was so dim that at first he could not distinguish the occupant, but when his eyes became accustomed to the darkness, he discovered the figure of the prisoner, who was lying with his back toward him on the ground of the little hut with nothing but a thin blanket beneath him. The only light revealing the barren details of this Indian residence sifted through the small doorway or peered timorously down through a narrow aperture in the roof that served for a chimney. As Saint-Prosper gazed at the

prostrate man, the latter moved uneasily, and from the parched lips fell a few words:

"Lock the doors, Oly-koeks! Hear the songsters, Mynheer Ten Breecheses! Birds of prey, you Dutch varlet! What do you think of the mistress of the manor? The serenading anti-renters have come for her." Then he repeated more slowly: "The squaw Pewasch! For seventeen and one-half ells of duffels! A rare principality for the scornful minx! Lord! how the birds sing now around the manor--screech owls, cat-birds, bobolinks!"

The soldier started back, vivid memories assailing his mind. Who was this man whose brain, independent of the corporeal shell, played waywardly with scenes, characters and events, indissolubly associated with his own life?

"Do you know, Little Thunder, the Lord only rebuked the Pharisees?" continued the prostrate man. "Though the Pharisee triumphs after all! But it was the stroller I wanted, not the principality."

He stirred quickly, as if suddenly aware of the presence of another in the hut, and, turning, lifted his head in a startled manner, surveying the figure near the doorway with conflicting emotions written on his pallid countenance. Perhaps some fragment of a dream yet lingered in his brain; perhaps he was confused at the sight of a face that met his excited look with one of doubt and bewilderment, but only partial

realization of the identity of the intruder came to him in his fevered condition.

Arising deliberately, his body, like a machine, obeying automatically some unconscious power, he confronted the officer, who recognized in him, despite his thin, worn face and eyes, unnaturally bright, the once pretentious land baron, Edward Mauville. Moving toward the door, gazing on Saint-Prosper as though he was one of the figures of a disturbing phantasm, he reached the threshold, and, lifting his hand above his head, the prisoner placed it against one of the supports of the hut and stood leaning there. From the creation of his mind's eye, as he doubtlessly, half-conscious of his weakness, designated the familiar form, he glanced at the sentinel and shook as though abruptly conscious of his situation. Across the valley the soldiers showed signs of bestirring themselves, the smoke of many fires hovering earthward beneath the mist. Drawing his thin frame proudly to its full height, with a gesture of disdain for physical weakness, and setting his keen, wild eyes upon the soldier, Mauville said in a hollow tone:

"Is that really you, Mr. Saint-Prosper? At first I thought you but a trick of the imagination. Well, look your fill upon me! You are my Nemesis come to see the end."

"I am here by chance, Edward Mauville; an officer in the American army!"

"And I, a spy in the Mexican army. So are we authorized foes."

Rubbing his trembling hands together, his eyes shifted from the dark birds to the mists, then from the phantom forests back to the hut, finally resting on his shabby boots of yellow leather. The sunlight penetrating a rift in the mist settled upon him as he moved feebly and uncertainly through the doorway and seated himself upon a stool. This sudden glow brought into relief his ragged, unkempt condition, the sallowness of his face, and his wasted form, and Saint-Prosper could not but contrast pityingly this cheerless object, in the garb of a ranchero, with the prepossessing, sportive heir who had driven through the Shadengo Valley.

Apparently now the sun was grateful to his bent, stricken figure, and, basking in it, he recalled his distress of the previous night:

"This is better. Not long ago I awoke with chattering teeth. 'This,' I said, 'is life; a miasma, cold, discomfort,' Yes, yes; a fever, a miasma, with phantoms fighting you--struggling to choke you--but now"--he paused, and fumbling in his pocket, drew out a cigarette case, which he opened, but found empty. A cigar the other handed him he took mechanically and lighted with scrupulous care. Near at hand the guard, more cheerful under the prospect of speedy relief from his duties, could be heard humming to himself:

"Oh, Teady-foley, you are my darling,
You are my looking-glass night and morning--"

Watching the smoker, Saint-Prosper asked himself how came Mauville to be serving against his own country, or why he should have enlisted at all, this pleasure-seeking man of the world, to whom the hardships of a campaign must have been as novel as distasteful.

"Are you satisfied with your trial?" said the soldier at length.

"Yes," returned Mauville, as if breaking from a reverie. "I confess I am the secret agent of Santa Anna and would have carried information from your lines. I am here because there is more of the Latin than the Anglo-Saxon in me. Many of the old families"--with a touch of insane pride--"did not regard the purchase of Louisiana by the United States as a transaction alienating them from other ties. Fealty is not a commercial commodity. But this," he added, scornfully, "is something you can not understand. You soldiers of fortune draw your swords for any master who pays you."

The wind moaned down the mountain side, and the slender trees swayed and bent; only the heavy and ponderous cactus remained motionless, a formidable monarch receiving obeisance from supple courtiers. Like cymbals, the leaves clashed around this armament of power with its thousand spears out-thrust in all directions.

The ash fell from the cigar as Mauville held the weed before his eyes.

"It is an hour-glass," he muttered. "When smoked--Oh, for the power of Jupiter to order four nights in one, the better to pursue his love follies! Love follies," he repeated, and, as a new train of fancy was awakened, he regarded Saint-Prosper venomously.

"Do you know she is the daughter of a marquis?" said Mauville, suddenly.

"Who?" asked the soldier.

"The stroller, of course. You can never win her," he added, contemptuously. "She knows all about that African affair."

Saint-Prosper started violently, but in a moment Mauville's expression changed, and he appeared plunged in thought.

"The last time I saw her," he said, half to himself, "she was dressed in black--her face as noonday--her hair black as midnight--crowning her with languorous allurement!"

He repeated the last word several times like a man in a dream.

"Allurement! allurement!" and again relapsed into a silence that was

half-stupor.

By this time the valley, with the growing of the day, began to lose much of its evil aspect, and the eye, tempted through glades and vistas, lingered upon gorgeous forms of inflorescence. The land baron slowly blew a wreath of smoke in the air--a circle, mute reminder of eternity!--and threw the end of the cigar into the bushes. Looking long and earnestly at the surrounding scene, he started involuntarily. "The dark valley--whar de mists am risin'--I see yo' da, honey--fo'ebber and fo'ebber--"

As he surveyed this prospect, with these words ringing in his ears, the brief silence was broken by a bugle call and the trampling of feet.

"The trumpet shall sound and the dead shall arise," said the prisoner, turning and facing the soldiers calmly. "You have come for me?" he asked, quietly.

"Yes," said the officer in command. "General Scott has granted your request in view of certain circumstances, and you will be shot, instead of hanged."

The face of the prisoner lighted wonderfully. He drew himself erect and smiled with some of the assumption of the old insolence, that expression Saint-Prosper so well remembered! His features took on a

semblance to the careless, dashing look they had borne when the soldier crossed weapons with him at the Oaks, and he neither asked nor intended to give quarter.

"I thank you," he observed, courteously. "At least, I shall die like a gentleman. I am ready, sir! Do not fasten my hands. A Mauville can die without being tied or bound."

The officer hesitated: "As to that--" he began.

"It is a reasonable request," said Saint-Prosper, in a low tone.

Mauville abruptly wheeled; his face, dark and sinister, was lighted with envenomed malignity; an unnaturally clear perception replaced the stupor of his brain, and, bending toward Saint-Prosper, his eye rested upon him with such rancor and malevolence the soldier involuntarily drew away. But one word fell from the land baron's lips, low, vibrating, full of inexpressible bitterness. "Traitor!"

"Come, come!" interrupted the officer in command of the execution party; "time is up. As I was told not to fasten your hands, you shall have your wish. Confess now, that is accommodating?"

"Thanks," returned Mauville carelessly, relapsing into his old manner. "You are an obliging fellow! I would do as much for you."

"Not much danger of that," growled the other. "But we'll take the will for the deed. Forward, march!"

* * * * *

After the reverberations, carried from rock to rock with menacing reiteration, had ceased, the stillness was absolute. Even the song-bird remained frightened into silence by those awful echoes. Then the sun rested like a benediction on the land and the white cross of Cortez was distinctly outlined against the blue sky. But soon the long roll of drums followed this interval of quiet.

"Fall in!" "Attention; shoulder arms!" And the sleeping spirit of the Aztec war-god floated in the murmur which, increasing in volume, arose to tumultuous shout.

"On to Chapultepec! On to Chapultepec!" came from a thousand throats; arms glistened in the sun, bugles sounded resonant in the air, and the pattering noise of horses' hoofs mingled with the stentorian voices of the rough teamsters and the cracking of the whips. Like an irresistible, all-compelling wave, the troops swept out of the valley to hurl themselves against castle and fortress and to plant their colors in the heart of the capital city.

CHAPTER VII

A MEETING ON THE MOUNT

Clothed at its base in a misty raiment of purple, the royal hill lifted above the valley an Olympian crest of porphyritic rock into the fathomless blue. Here not Jupiter and his court looked serenely down upon the struggling race, "indifferent from their awful height," but a dark-hued god, in Aztec vestments, gazed beyond the meadows to the floating flower beds, the gardens with their baths, and the sensuous dancing girls. All this, but a panorama between naps, soon faded away; the god yawned, drew his cloak of humming bird feathers more closely about him and sank back to rest. An uproar then disturbed his paleozoic dreams; like fluttering spirits of the garish past, the butterflies arose in the forest glades; and the voices of old seemed to chant the Aztec psalm: "The horrors of the tomb are but the cradle of the sun, and the dark shadows of death the brilliant lights for the stars." Even so they had chanted when the early free-booters burst upon the scene and beheld the valley with its frame-work of mountains and two guardian volcanoes, the Gog and Magog of the table-land.

Now again, from the towering column of Montezuma's cypress, to the city marked by spires, the thunder rolled and echoed onward even to the pine-clad cliffs and snow-crowned summits of the rocky giants. Puffs of smoke dotted the valley beneath the mount, and, as the

answering reports reverberated across space, nature's mortars in the inclosure of mountains sent forth threatening wreaths of white in sympathy with the eight-inch howitzers and sixteen-pounders turned upon the crest of the royal hill.

When the trees were yet wet with their bath of dew the booming of artillery and the clattering of small arms dispelled that peace which partook of no harsher discord than the purling of streams and the still, small voices of the forest. Through the groves where the spirit of Donna Marina--the lost love of the marauder--was said to wander, shrieked the round shot, shells and grape. Through tangled shrubberies, bright with flowers and colored berries, pierced the discharge of canister; the air, fragrant at the dawn with orange blossom and starry jessamine, was noisome with suffocating, sulphurous fumes, and, beneath the fetid shroud, figures in a fog heedlessly trampled the lilies, the red roses and "flowers of the heart."

From the castle on the summit--mortal trespass upon the immortal pale of the gods!--the upward shower was answered by an iron downpour, and two storming parties, with ladders, pick-axes and crows, advanced, one on each side of the hill, to the attack. Boom! boom! before one of the parties, climbing and scrambling to the peak, belched the iron missives of destruction from the concealed mouths of heavy guns, followed by the rattling shower from small arms.

Surprised, they paused, panting from the swift ascent, some throwing themselves prone upon the earth, while the grape and canister passed harmlessly over them, others seeking such shelter as rocks, trees and shrubs afforded. Here and there a man fell, but was not suffered to lie long exposed to the fire of the redoubt which, strongly manned, held them in check midway to the summit. Doggedly their comrades rescued the wounded and quickly conveyed them to the rear.

"They've set out their watch-dogs," remarked the general commanding the assault on that side of the hill, to one of his officers, as he critically surveyed the formidable defense through the tangled shrubbery. "Here is a battery we hadn't reckoned on."

"It was to be expected, sir," responded the officer. "They were sure to have some strong point we couldn't locate."

"Yes," grumbled the general; "in such a jumble of foliage and rocks it would take an eagle's eye to pick out all their miserable ambuscades."

"I have no doubt, sir, the men are rested now," ventured the other.

"No doubt they are," chuckled the general, still studying the situation, glancing to the right and the left of the redoubt. "The more fighting they get the more they want. They are not so band-boxy as they were, but remind me of an old, mongrel dog I once owned. He

wasn't much to look at--but I'll tell you the story later." A sudden quick decision appearing on his face. Evidently the working of his mind had been foreign to his words.

"Saint-Prosper," he said, "I suppose the boys on the other side are going up all the time? I promised our troops the honor of pulling down that flag. I'm a man of my word; go ahead and take the batteries and"--stroking his long gray goatee--"beat Pillow to the top."

A word; a command; they rushed forward; not a laggard in the ranks; not a man who shirked the leaden shower; not one who failed to offer his breast openly and fearlessly to the red death which to them might come when it would. Unwaveringly over rocks, chasms and mines, they followed the tall figure of their leader; death underfoot, death overhead! What would courage avail against concealed mines? Yet like a pack of hounds that reck naught while the scent is warm, they pressed forward, ever forward; across the level opening, where some dropped out of the race, and over the ramparts! A brief struggle; confusion, turmoil; something fearful occurring that no eye could see in its entirety through the smoke; afterwards, a great shout that announced to the palace on the mount the fate of the intermediary batteries!

But there was sharper and more arduous work to come; this, merely a foretaste of the last, fierce stand of the besieged; a stand in which they knew they were fighting for everything, where defeat meant the second conquest of Mexico! From the batteries the assailants had

captured to the foot of the castle seemed but a little way to them in their zeal; no one thought of weariness, or the toil of the ascent. But one determination possessed them--to end it all quickly; to carry everything before them! Their victory at the redoubt gave them such sudden, wild confidence that castles seemed no more than ant-hills--to be trampled on! Instinctively every man felt sure of the day and already experienced the glory of conquering that historic hill; that invincible fortress! Over the great valley, so beautiful in its physical features, so inspiring in its associations, should hang the stars of the North, with the stars of heaven!

The scaling ladders were brought up and planted by the storming party; the first to mount were hurled back, killed or wounded, to the rocks below, but others took their places; a lodgment was effected, and, like the water bursting over a dike, a tide of besiegers found ingress.

Under a galling fire, with shouts that rang above the noise of rifles, they drove the masses of the enemy from their guns; all save one, not a Mexican from his fair skin, who stood confidently beside his piece, an ancient machine, made of copper and strengthened by bands of iron. A handsome face; dead to morality, alive to pleasure; the face of a man past thirty, the expression of immortal one-and-twenty! A figure from the pages of Ovid, metamorphosed to a gunner of Santa Anna! The bright radiance from a cloudless sky, the smoke having drifted westward from the summit, fell upon him and his gun.

With inscrutable calmness, one hand fondling the breech, he regarded the fleeting figures and the hoarse-throated pursuers; then, as if to time the opportunity to the moment, he bent over the gun.

"I wonder if this first-born can still bark!" he muttered.

But an instant's hesitation, friend and foe being fairly intermingled, was fatal to his purpose; the venerable culverin remained silent, and the gunner met hand-to-hand a figure that sprang from the incoming host. Simultaneously the rapid firing of a new wave of besiegers from the other side of the castle threw once more a pall of smoke over the scene, and, beneath its mantle, the two men were like figures struggling in a fog, feeling rather than seeing each other's blade, divining by touch the cut, pass or aggressive thrust.

"Faugh!" laughed the gunner. "They'll kill us with smoke."

The discharge of small arms gradually ceased; the fresh breeze again cleared the crest of the mount, showing the white walls of the structure which had been so obstinately defended; the valley, where the batteries now lay silent, having spoken their thundering prologue, and the alien flag, the regimental colors of the invaders, floating from the upper walls. Below on the road toward the city, a band of white across the table land, successive spots of smoke momentarily appeared and were succeeded, after a considerable interval, by the

rub-a-dub of rifles. From the disenchanting distance the charge of a body of men, in the attempt to dislodge a party entrenched in a ditch, lost the tragic aspect of warfare, and the soldiers who fell seemed no larger than the toy figures of a nursery game.

With the brightening of the summit to the light of day, eagerly the two combatants near the copper gun gazed for the first time into each other's eyes, and, at that trenchant glance, a tremor crossed the features of the gunner, and his arm, with its muscles of steel, suddenly became inert, powerless.

"Mon Dieu!--'Tis Ernest--little Ernest!" he exclaimed, wonderingly.

For all that his opponent's sword, ominously red from the fierce first assault at the wall, was at his breast, he made no effort to oppose its threatening point, when a grape-shot, swifter than the blade, fairly struck the gunner. With blood streaming from his shoulder, he swayed from side to side, passing his hand before his eyes as one who questions oracular evidence, and then sank to the earth with an arm thrown over the tube of copper. Above his bronzed face the light curls waved like those of a Viking; though his clothes were dyed with the sanguinary hue and his chest rose and fell with labored breathing, it was with an almost quizzical glance he regarded the other who stood as if turned to stone.

"That was not so easily done, Ernest," he said, not unkindly, "but

surprise broke down my guard."

"Before God, it was not I!" cried the soldier, starting from a trance.

"And if it were!" With his free arm he felt his shoulder. "I believe you are right," he observed, coolly. "Swords break no bones."

"I will get a surgeon," said the other, as he turned.

"What for? To shake his head? Get no one, or if--for boyish days!--you want to serve me, lend me your canteen."

Saint-Prosper held it to his lips, and he drank thirstily.

"That was a draught in an oasis. I had the desert in my throat--the desert, the wild desert! What a place to meet! But they caught Abd-el-Kader, and there was nothing for it but to flee! Besides, I am a rolling stone."

To hear him who had betrayed his country and shed the blood of his comrades, characterize himself by no harsher term was an amazing revelation of the man's character.

The space around them had become almost deserted; here and there lay figures on the ground among which might be distinguished a

sub-lieutenant and other students of the military college, the castle having been both academy and garrison. Their tuition barely over, so early had they given up their lives beneath the classic walls of their alma mater! The exhilarating cheering and shouting had subsided; the sad after-flavor succeeded the lust of conquest.

"Yes," continued the gunner, though the words came with an effort. "First, it was the desert. What a place to roll and rove! I couldn't help it for the life of me! When I was a boy I ran away from school; a lad, I ran away from college! If I had been a sailor I would have deserted the ship. After they captured the prophet, I deserted the desert. So, hey for Mexico, a hilly place for a rolling stone!"

He gasped, held his hand to his shoulder and brought it away covered with red. But that Saint-Prosper knelt swiftly, sustaining and supporting him, he would have slid to the ground. He smiled--sweetly enough--on the stern soldier and placed his moist and stained hand caressingly on that of his companion. Seeing them thus, it was not difficult to trace a family likeness--a similarity in their very dissimilarity. The older was younger; the younger, older. The gunner's hair was light, his face wild as a gerfalcon beneath; the other's dark, with a countenance, habitually repressed, but now, at the touch of that dishonored hand, grown cold and harsh; yet despite the total difference of expression, the hereditary resemblance could not be stamped out. Even the smile of the wounded man was singularly like that of his brother--a rare transformation that seldom failed to

charm.

"That's my story," he said, smiling now, as though all the problems of life and death could be thus dismissed. "As the prophet said: 'I have urged my camel through every desert!' You see I know my Koran well. But how came you here, Ernest? I thought you were in Africa, colonizing--us!"

"It was impossible to stay there long," replied Saint-Prosper, slowly.

"There's that cloud of smoke again," muttered the wounded man, apparently oblivious to the other's response. As he spoke he withdrew his hand from that of his brother. At that moment the tropic sun was bathing him in its light and the white walls shone with luster. "No; it's like the desert; the dark hour before the sand-storm." Upon his brow the perspiration gathered, but his lip curled half-scornfully, half-defiantly. "Turn me toward the valley, Ernest. There's more space; more light!"

The soldier, an automaton in passive compliance, placed him where he commanded the outlook cityward; the open plain, protected by the breast-works of mountains; the distant spires trembling on the horizon; the lakes which once marked the Western Venice, a city of perfume and song. Striking a body of water, the sun converted it into a glowing shield, a silver escutcheon of the land of silver, and, in

contrast with this polished splendor, the shadows, trailing on the far-away mountains, were soft, deep and velvety. But the freedom of the outlook afforded the wounded man little comfort.

"The storm!" he said.

A change passed over his face, as of a shadow drawn before it. He groped helplessly with his hand.

"Feel in my burnoose, Ernest. A bag--around my neck--open it!"

Saint-Prosper thrust his hand within the coat, shuddering at the contact with the ebbing life's blood, and drew forth a leather bag which he placed in the other's trembling fingers. With an effort, breathing laboriously, and staring hard, as though striving to penetrate a gathering film, the wounded man finally managed to display the contents of the bag, emptying them in his palm, where they glinted and gleamed in the sun's rays. Sapphires, of delicate blue; emeralds with vitreous luster; opals of brilliant iridescence--but, above all, a ruby of perfect color and extraordinary size, cut en cabachon, and exhibiting a marvelous star of many rays; the ruby of Abd-el-Kader!

With a venal expression of delight, the gunner regarded the contents of the bag, feeling the gems one by one. "The rarest stone--from the Sagyin hills, Ernest!" he whispered, as his trembling fingers played with the ruby.

But even as he fondled it, a great pain crossed his breast; he gripped his shoulder tight with his free hand, clutching the precious stones hard in his clenched fist. Thus he remained, how long the other never knew, panting, growing paler, as the veins that carried life to his heart were being slowly emptied.

His head dropped. "How dark!" he murmured. "Like a m'chacha where the hashish-smokers dream!"

The younger brother thought his energy was spent when he looked up sharply.

"The lamp's out, you Devil Jew!" he cried. "The pipe, too--spawn of hell!"

And he dropped back like stone, the gems falling from his hand, which twitched spasmodically on the ground and then was still. Saint-Prosper bent over him, but the heart, famished for nourishment, had ceased to beat; the restless, wayward soul had fled from its tabernacle of dust. Save for the stain on his breast and the fixedness of his eyes, he might have been sleeping.

Mechanically the soldier gathered the sapphires, emeralds and other gems--flashing testimony of that thankless past--and, leaning against the wall, gazed afar to the snow-capped volcanoes. Even as he

looked, the vapors arose from the solfataras of the "smoking mountain" and a vast shower of cinders and stones was thrown into the air. Unnoticed passed the eruption before the gaze of Saint-Prosper, whose mind in a torpor swept dully back to youth's roseate season, recalling the homage of the younger for the elder brother, a worship as natural as pagan adoration of the sun. From the sanguine fore-time to the dead present lay a bridge of darkness. With honor within grasp, deliberately he had sought dishonor, little recking of shame and murder, and childishly husbanding green, red and blue pebbles!

Weighing the stones in his hand now, Ernest Saint-Prosper looked at them long and bitterly. For these the honor and pride of an old family had been sold. For these he himself had endured the reflected disgrace; isolation from comradeship; distrust which had blighted his military career at the outset. How different had been the reality from his expectations; the buoyant hopes of youth; the fond anticipation of glory, succeeded by stigma and stain! And, as the miserable, perplexing panorama of these later years pictured itself in his brain he threw, with a sudden gesture, the gems far from him, over the wall, out toward the valley!

Like dancing beams of color, they flashed a moment in mid air; then mingled their hues with the rainbow tints of a falling stream. Lost to sight, they sank in the crystal waters which leaped with a caressing murmur toward the table-land; only the tiny spectrum, vivid reminder

of their color, still waved and wavered from rock to rock above a pellucid pool.

"I beg your pardon, Colonel," said a voice at his elbow, breaking in upon his reflections; "are you wounded?"

With drawn features, the officer turned.

"No; I am not wounded."

"The general directs you to take this message to the commanding general," continued the little aide. "I believe I may congratulate you, sir, for you will have the honor of bearing the news of the victory." He handed Saint-Prosper a sealed message. "It's been a glorious day, sir, but"--gazing carelessly around him--"has cost many a brave life!"

"Yes, many a life!" answered the other, placing the message in his breast and steadfastly regarding for the last time the figure beneath the gun.

"We ought to be in the City of Mexico in a day or two, sir," resumed the aide. "Won't it be jolly though, after forced marches and all that sort of thing! Fandangos; tambourines; cymbals! And the pulque! What creatures of the moment we are, sir!" he added, with sudden thoughtfulness. "'Twill be, after all, like dancing over the graves of

our dear comrades!"

CHAPTER VIII

A FAIR PENITENT

The reception to General Zachary Taylor, on his return from Mexico, and the inauguration of the carnival combined to the observance of a dual festival day in the Crescent City. Up the river, past the rice fields, disturbing the ducks and pelicans, ploughed the noisy craft bearing "Old Rough and Ready" to the open port of the merry-making town. When near the barracks, the welcoming cannon boomed, and the affrighted darkies on the remote plantations shook with dire forebodings of a Mexican invasion.

The boat rounded at the Place d'Armes, where, beneath a triumphal arch, General Taylor received the crown and chaplet of the people--popular applause--and a salvo of eloquence from the mayor. With flying colors and nourish of trumpets, a procession of civic and military bodies was then formed, the parade finally halting at the St. Charles, where the fatted calf had been killed and the succulent ox roasted. Sounding a retreat, the veteran commander fell back upon a private parlor to recuperate his forces in anticipation of the forthcoming banquet.

From this stronghold, where, however, not all of the enemy--his friends--could be excluded, there escaped an officer, with: "I'll look around town a little, General."

"Look around!" said the commander at the door. "I should think we had looked around! Well, don't fall foul of too many juleps."

With a laughing response, the young man pushed his way through the jostling crowd near the door, traversed the animated corridor, and soon found himself out on the busy street. Amid the variegated colors and motley throng, he walked, not, however, in King Carnival's gay domains, but in a city of recollections. The tavern he had just left was associated with an unforgotten presence; the stores, the windows, the thoroughfares themselves were fraught with retrospective suggestion of the strollers.

Even now--and he came to an abrupt standstill--he was staring at the bill-board of the theater where she had played, the familiar entrance bedecked with bunting and festival inscriptions. Before its classic portals appeared the black-letter announcement of an act by "Impecunious Jordan, Ethiopian artist, followed by a Tableau of General Scott's Capture of the City of Mexico." Mechanically he stepped within and approached the box office. From the little cupboard, a strange face looked forth; even the ticket vender of old had been swallowed up by the irony of fate, and, instead of the well-remembered blond mustache of the erstwhile seller of seats, a dark-bearded man, with sallow complexion, inquired:

"How many?"

"One," said Saint-Prosper, depositing a Mexican piece on the counter before the cubby-hole.

"We've taken in plenty of this kind of money to-day," remarked the man, holding up the coin. "I reckon you come to town with old Zach?"

"Yes." The soldier was about to turn away, when he changed his mind and observed: "You used to give legitimate drama here."

"That was some time ago," said the man in the box, reflectively. "The soldiers like vaudeville. Ever hear Impecunious Jordan?"

"I never did."

"Then you've got a treat," continued the vender. "He's the best in his line. Hope you'll enjoy it, sir," he concluded, with the courtesy displayed toward one and all of "Old Rough and Ready's" men that day. "It's the best seat left in the house. You come a little late, you know." And as the other moved away:

"How different they look before and after! They went to Mexico fresh as daisies, and come back--those that do--dead beat, done up!"

Passing through the door, Saint-Prosper was ushered to his seat in a renovated auditorium; new curtain, re-decorated stalls, mirrors and

gilt in profusion; the old restfulness gone, replaced by glitter and show. Amid changed conditions, the derangement of fixed external form and outline, the sight of a broad face in the orchestra and the aspect of a colossal form riveted his attention. This person was neither stouter nor thinner than before; he perspired neither more nor less; he was neither older nor younger--seemingly; he played on his instrument neither better nor worse. Youth might fade, honors take wing, the face of nature change, but Hans, Gargantuan Hans, appeared but a figure in an eternal present! Gazing at that substantial landmark, the soldier was carried back in thought over the long period of separation to a forest idyl; a face in the firelight; the song of the katydid; the drumming of the woodpecker. Dreams; vain dreams! They had assailed him before, but seldom so sharply as now in a place consecrated to the past.

"Look out for the dandies,
  Girls, beware;
Look out for their blandishments,
  Dears, take care!
For they're always ready--remember this!--
To pilfer from maids an unwilling kiss.
  Oh, me! Oh, my! There! There!" (Imaginary slaps.)

sang and gesticulated a lady in abbreviated skirts and low-cut dress, winking and blinking in ironical shyness, and concluding with a flaunting of her gown, a toe pointed ceilingward, and a lively

"breakdown." Then she vanished with a hop, skip and a bow, reappeared with a ravishing smile and threw a generous assortment of kisses among the audience, and disappeared with another hop, skip and a bow, as Impecunious Jordan burst upon the spectators from the opposite side of the stage.

Even the sight of Hans, a finger-post pointing to ways long since traversed, could not reconcile the soldier to his surroundings; the humor of the burnt-cork artist seemed inappropriate to the place; his grotesque dancing inadmissible in that atmosphere once consecrated to the comedy of manners and the stately march of the classic drama. Where Hamlet had moralized, a loutish clown now beguiled the time with some tom-foolery, his wit so broad, his quips were cannon-balls, and his audience, for the most part soldiers from Mexico, open-mouthed swallowed the entire bombardment. But Saint-Prosper, finding the performance dull, finally rose and went out, not waiting for the thrilling Tableaux of the Entrance into the City of Mexico of a hundred American troops (impersonated by young ladies in tropical attire) and the submission of Santa Anna's forces (more young ladies) by sinking gracefully to their bended knees.

Fun and frolic were now in full swing on the thoroughfares; Democritus, the rollicker, had commanded his subjects to drive dull care away and they obeyed the jovial lord of laughter. Animal spirits ran high; mischief beguiled the time; mummery romped and rioted. Marshaled by disorder, armed with drollery and divers-hued banners,

they marched to the Castle of Chaos, where the wise are fools, the old are young and topsy-turvy is the order of the day.

As Saint-Prosper stood watching the versicolored concourse swarm by, a sudden rush of bystanders to view Faith on a golden pedestal, looking more like Coquetry, propelled a dainty figure against the soldier. Involuntarily he put out his arm which girded a slender waist; Faith drove simpering by; the crowd melted like a receding wave, and the lady extricated herself, breathless as one of the maids in Lorenzo de Medici's Songs of the Carnival.

"How awkward!" she murmured. "How--"

The sentence remained unfinished and an exclamation, "Mr. Saint-Prosper!" punctuated a gleam of recognition.

"Miss Duran!" he exclaimed, equally surprised, for he had thought the strollers scattered to the four winds.

"Mrs. Service, if you please!" Demurely; at the same time extending her hand with a faint flush. "Yes; I am really and truly married! But it is so long since we met, I believe I--literally flew to your arms!"

"That was before you recognized me," he returned, in the same tone.

Susan laughed. "But how do you happen to be here? I thought you were dead. No; only wounded? How fortunate! Of course you came with the others. I should hardly know you. I declare you're as thin as a lath and gaunt as a ghost. You look older, too. Remorse, I suppose, for killing so many poor Mexicans!"

"And you"--surveying her face, which had the freshness of morn--"look younger!"

"Of course!" Adjusting some fancied disorder of hair or bonnet. "Marriage is a fountain of youth for"--with a sigh--"old maids. Susan Duran, spinster! Horrible! Do you blame me?"

"For getting married? Not at all. Who is the fortunate man?" asked Saint-Prosper.

"A minister; an orthodox minister; a most orthodox minister!"

"No?" His countenance expressed his sense of the incongruity of the union. Susan one of the elect; the meek and lowly yokemate of--"How did it happen?" he said.

"In a perverse moment, I--went to church," answered Susan. "There, I met him--I mean, I saw him--no, I mean, I heard him! It was enough. All the women were in love with him. How could I help it?"

"He must have been very persuasive."

"Persuasive! He scolded us every minute. Dress and the devil! I"--casting down her eyes--"interested him from the first. He--he married me to reform me."

"Ah," commented the soldier, gazing doubtfully upon Susan's smart gown, which, with elaborate art, followed the contours of her figure.

"But, of course, one must keep up appearances, you know," she continued. "What's the use of being a minister's wife if you aren't popular with the congregation? At least," she added, "with part of them!" And Susan tapped the pavement with a well-shod boot and showed her white teeth. "If you weren't popular, you couldn't fill the seats--I mean pews," she added, evasively. "But you must come and see me--us, I should say."

"Unfortunately, I am leaving to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" repeated Susan, reflectively. The pupils of her eyes contracted, something they did whenever she was thinking deeply, and her gaze passed quickly over his face, striving to read his impassive features. "So soon? When the carnival is on! That is too bad, to stay only one day, and not call on any of your old friends! Constance, I am sure, would be delighted to see you."

Many women would have looked away under the circumstances, but Susan's eyes were innocently fixed upon his. Half the pleasure of the assurance was in the accompanying glance and the friendly smile that went with it.

But a quiet question, "Miss Carew is living here?" was all the satisfaction she received.

"Yes. Have you not heard? She has a lovely home and an embarrassment of riches. Sweet embarrassment! Health and wealth! What more could one ask? Although I forgot, she was taken ill shortly after you left."

"Ill," he said, starting.

"Quite! But soon recovered!" And Susan launched into a narration of the events that had taken place while he was in Mexico, to which he listened with the composure of a man who, having had his share of the vagaries of fate, is not to be taken aback by new surprises, however singular or tragic. Susan expected an expression of regret--by look or word--over the loss of the marquis' fortune, but either he simulated indifference or passed the matter by with philosophical fortitude.

"Poor Barnes!" was his sole comment.

"Yes; it was very lonely for Constance at first," rattled on Susan. "But I fancy she will find a woman's solace for that ailment," she

added meaningly.

"Marriage?" he asked soberly.

"Well, the engagement is not yet announced," said Susan, hesitatingly. "But you know how things get around? And the count has been so attentive! You remember him surely--the Count de Propriac? But I must be off. I have an appointment with my husband and am already half an hour late."

"Don't let me detain you longer, then, I beg."

"Oh, I don't mind. He's so delightfully jealous when I fail to appear on the stroke of the clock! Always imagines I am in some misch--but I mustn't tell tales out of school! So glad to have met you! Come and see me--do!"

And Susan with friendly hand-clasp and lingering look, tore herself away, the carnival lightness in her feet and the carnival laughter in her eyes.

"He is in love with her still," she thought, "or he wouldn't have acted so indifferent!" Her mind reverted to a cold little message she had received from Constance. "And to think he was innocent after all!" she continued, mentally reviewing the contents of the letter in which Constance had related the conversation with the lawyer. "I don't

believe he'll call on her now, though, after--Well, why shouldn't I have told him what every one is talking about? Why not, indeed?"

A toss of the head dismissed the matter and any doubts pertaining thereto, while her thoughts flew from past to present, as a fortress on a car, its occupants armed with pellets of festival conflict, drove by amid peals of laughter. Absorbed in this scene of merriment, Susan forgot her haste, and kept her apostolic half waiting at the rendezvous with the patience of a Jacob tarrying for a Rachel. But when she did finally appear, with hat not perfectly poised, her hair in a pretty disarray, she looked so waywardly charming, he forgave her on the spot, and the lamb led the stern shepherd with a crook from Eve's apple tree.

"As thin as a lath and gaunt as a ghost!" repeated Saint-Prosper, as the fair penitent vanished in a whirl of gaiety. "Susan always was frank."

Smiling somewhat bitterly, he paused long enough to light a cigar, but it went out in his fingers as he strolled mechanically toward the wharves, through the gardens of a familiar square, where the wheezing of the distant steamers and the echoes of the cathedral clock marked the hours of pleasure or pain to-day as it had tolled them off yesterday. Beyond the pale of the orange trees with their golden wealth, the drays were rumbling in the streets and there were the same signs of busy traffic--for the carnival had not yet become a legal

holiday--that he had observed when the strollers had reached the city and made their way to the St. Charles. He saw her anew, pale and thoughtful, leaning on the rail of the steamer looking toward the city, where events, undreamed of, were to follow thick and fast. He saw her, a slender figure, earnest, self-possessed, enter the city gates, unheralded, unknown. He saw her as he had known her in the wilderness--not as fancy might now depict her, the daughter of a marquis--a strolling player, and as such he loved best to think of her.

Arising out of his physical weakness and the period of inaction following the treaty of peace, he experienced a sudden homesickness for his native land; a desire to re-visit familiar scenes, to breathe the sweet air of the country, where his boyhood had been passed, to listen to the thunder of the boulevards, to watch the endless, sad-joyful processions.

Not far distant from the blossoming, redolent square was the office of the Trans-Atlantic Steamship Company, where a clerk, with a spray of jessamine in his coat, bent cordially toward Saint-Prosper as the latter entered, and, approaching the desk, inquired:

"The Dauphin is advertised to sail to-morrow for France?"

"Yes, sir; at twelve o'clock noon."

"Book me for a berth. Ernest Saint-Prosper," he added, in answer to the other's questioning look.

"Very good, sir. Would you like some labels for your baggage? Where shall we send for it? The St. Charles? Very well, sir. Are you going to the tableaux to-night?" he continued, with hospitable interest in one whom he rightly conceived a stranger in the city. "They say it will be the fashionable event. Good-day." As the prospective passenger paid for and received his ticket. "A pleasant voyage! The Dauphin is a new ship and should cross in three weeks--barring bad weather! Don't forget the tableaux. Everybody will be there."

The soldier did not reply; his heart had given a sudden throb at the clerk's last words. Automatically he placed his ticket in his pocket, and randomly answered the employee's further inquiries for instructions. He was not thinking of the Dauphin or her new engines, the forerunner of the modern quadruple-expansion arrangement, but through his brain rang the assurance: "Everybody will be there." And all the way up the street, it repeated itself again and again.

CHAPTER IX

"COMUS' MISTICK WITCHERIES"

That elusive, nocturnal company, "The Mistick Krewe of Comus," had appeared--"Comus, deep skilled in all his mother's witcheries"--and the dwellers in Phantasmagoria were joyfully numerous. More plentiful than at a modern spectacular performance, reveled gods, demons and fairies, while the children resembled a flight of masquerading butterflies. The ball at the theater, the Roman Veglioni, succeeded elaborate tableaux, the "Tartarus," of the ancients, and "Paradise Lost," of Milton, in which the "Krewe" impersonated Pluto and Proserpine, the fates, harpies and other characters of the representation. In gallery, dress-circle and parquet, the theater was crowded, the spectacle, one of dazzling toilets, many of them from the ateliers of the Parisian modistes; a wonderful evolution of Proserpine's toga and the mortal robes of the immortal Fates. Picture followed picture: The expulsion from Paradise; the conference of the Gorgons, and the court of pandemonium, where gluttony, drunkenness, avarice and vanity were skilfully set forth in uncompromising colors.

Availing themselves of the open-house of the unknown "Krewe," a composite host that vanished on the stroke of twelve, many of "Old Rough and Ready's" retinue mingled with the gathering, their uniforms,

well-worn, even shabby, unlike the spick and span regimentals from the costumier. With bronzed faces and the indubitable air of campaigns endured, they were the objects of lively interest to the fair maskers, nor were themselves indifferent to the complaisance of their entertainers. Hands, burned by the sun, looked blacker that night, against the white gowns of waists they clasped; bearded faces more grim visaged in contrast with delicate complexions; embroidery and brocade whirled around with faded uniforms; and dancing aigrettes waved above frayed epaulets and shoulder straps.

"Loog at 'im!" murmured a fille à la cassette, regarding one of these officers who, however, held aloof from the festivities; a well-built young man, but thin and worn, as though he, like his uniform, had seen service. "If he would only carry my trunk!" she laughed, relapsing into French and alluding to the small chest she bore under her arm.

"Or my little white lamb!" gaily added her companion, a shepherdess.

And they tripped by with sidelong looks and obvious challenge which the quarry of these sprightly huntresses of men either chose to disregard or was unconscious of, as he deliberately surveyed his surroundings with more curiosity than pleasure and absently listened to a mountebank from "The Belle's Strategem."

"Who'll buy my nostrums?" cried the buffoon.

"What are they?" asked Folly, cantering near on a hobby horse.

"Different kinds for different people. Here's a powder for ladies--to dispel the rage for intrigue. Here's a pill for politicians--to settle bad consciences. Here's an eye-water for jealous husbands--it thickens the visual membrane. Here's something for the clergy--it eliminates windy discourses. Here's an infusion for creditors--it creates resignation and teaches patience."

"And what have you for lovers?"

"Nothing," answered the clown; "love like fever and ague must run its course. Nostrums! Who'll buy my nostrums?"

"Oh, I'm so glad I came!" enthusiastically exclaimed a tall, supple girl, laden with a mass of flowers.

"Isn't it too bad, though, you can't polka with some of the military gentlemen?" returned her companion who wore a toga and carried a lantern. "Mademoiselle Castiglione wouldn't let you come, until I promised not to allow you out of my sight."

"It was lovely of you to take me," she said, "and I don't mind about the military gentlemen."

"My dear, if all women were like you, we poor civilians would not be relegated to the background! I wish, though, I had worn some other costume. This--ahem, dress!--has a tendency to get between my legs and disconcert my philosophical dignity. I can understand why Diogenes didn't care about walking abroad. My only wonder is that everybody didn't stay in his tub in those days. Don't talk to me about the 'noble Roman!' Why, he wore skirts!"

"And Monsieur Intaglio lectured to us for an hour to-day about the wonderful drapery of the ancients!" laughed the girl. "The poetry of dress, he called it!"

"Then I prefer prose. Hello!"--pausing and raising his lantern, as they drew near the officer who had fallen under the observation of the fille à la cassette. "Colonel Saint-Prosper, or set me down for an ass--or Plato, which is the same thing!"

"Straws!" said the soldier, as the bard frankly lifted his mask and tilted it back over his forehead.

"Glad to see you!" continued the poet, extending his hand. "I haven't run across you before since the night of the banquet; the début of Barnes' company you remember? You must have left town shortly afterward. Returned this morning, of course! By the way, there's one of your old friends here to-night."

Saint-Prosper felt the color mount to his face, and even Straws noted the change. "Who is that?" asked the soldier, awkwardly.

"Mrs. Service--Miss Duran that was--now one of our most dashing--I should say, charitable, ladies. Plenty of men at Service's church now. She's dressed in Watteau-fashion to-night, so if you see any one skipping around, looking as though she had just stepped from the Embarkation for the Island of Venus, set her down for the minister's pretty wife!"

"And the minister?" asked Saint-Prosper, mechanically.

"He brought her; he compromised on a Roundhead costume, himself! But we must be off. Au revoir; don't be backward; the ladies are all military-mad. It may be a field of arms"--casting his glance over the assemblage of fashionably dressed ladies, with a quizzical smile--"but not hostile arms! Come, Celestina--Nydia, I mean!"

And Straws' arm stole about the waist of his companion, as Saint-Prosper watched them disappearing in the throng of dancers. It was Celestina's first ball, and after her long training at the Castiglione institute, she danced divinely. Evidently, too, she was reconciled to the warden's edict, denying her the freedom of the ball-room, for she showed no disposition to escape from Straws' watchful care. On the contrary, though her glance wandered to the wonders around her, they quickly returned to the philosopher with the lamp, as though she courted the

restraint to which she was subjected. Something like a pang shot through the soldier's breast as he followed the pair with his gaze; he seemed looking backward into a world of youth and pleasure, passed beyond recall.

"It is useless to deny it! I knew you when I first saw you!" exclaimed a familiar voice near by, and turning around sharply, the officer observed approaching a masked lady, graceful of figure and lacking nothing in the numerical strength of her escort. It was to her that these words were addressed by an agile man of medium stature who had apparently penetrated her disguise. The lady, who would have attracted attention anywhere by her bearing, wore a pardessus of white gauze, fitting close and bordered with a silver band; the sleeves, short; the skirt of white gauze and very ample, as the fashion of the day required; the feet shod in small white silk "bottines"; the hair in bands, ornamented with wild poppies. Altogether this costume was described by Phazma as "ravishing, the gown adorning the lady, and the lady the gown, her graces set forth against the sheen of voluminous satin folds, like those of some portrait by Sir Joshua or Gainsborough."

"How could you expect any one not to know you?" continued the speaker, as this little coterie drew near, their masks a pretext for mystery. "You may impersonate, but you can not deceive."

"That is a poor compliment, since you take me for an actress," laughed

the lady. An hilarious outburst from an ill-assorted cluster of maskers behind them drowned his reply, and the lady and her attendants passed on.

Saint-Prosper drew his breath sharply. "She is here, after all," he said to himself.

"A nostrum for jilted beaux!" called out a mountebank, seeing him standing there, preoccupied, alone, at the same time tendering a pill as large as a plum. A punchinello jarred against him with: "Pardonnez moi, pardie!" On the perfumed air the music swelled rapturously; a waltz, warm with the national life of Vienna; the swan song of Lanner! Softly, sweetly, breathed "Die Schönbrunner;" faster whirled the moving forms. Eyes flashed more brightly; little feet seemed born for dancing; cheeks, pale at midday, were flushed with excitement! Why doesn't he dance, wondered the lady with the white lamb. Carnival comes but once a year; a mad, merry time; when gaiety should sweep all cares out of doors!

"Said Strephon to Chloe: 'For a kiss,
I'll give thee the choice of my flock.'
Said Chloe to Strephon: 'What bliss,
If you'll add to the gift a new smock,'"

hummed the lively nymph, as she tripped by.

"Said Chloe to Strephon: 'For a kiss,
I'll return thee the choice of your flock.
Said Strephon to Chloe: 'What bliss,
With it I'll buy Phyllis a new frock,'"

she concluded, throwing a glance over her shoulder.

A sudden distaste for the festal ferment, the laughter and merriment; a desire to escape from the very exuberance of high spirits and cheer led the soldier to make his way slowly from the ball-room to the balcony, where, although not removed from the echoes of liveliness within, he looked out upon the quietude of the night. Overhead stretched the sky, a measureless ocean, with here and there a silvery star like the light on a distant ship; an unfathomable sea of ether that beat down upon him. Radiant and serene, in the boundless calm of the heavens, the splendent lanterns seemed suspended on stationary craft peacefully rocked at anchor. Longings, suppressed through months of absence, once more found full sway; Susan's words were recalled by the presence of the count.

Suddenly the song of "Die Schönbrunner" ceased within, and, as its pulsations became hushed, many of the dancers, an elate, buoyant throng, sought the balcony. Standing in the shadow near the entrance, aroused from a train of reflections by this abrupt exodus, the soldier saw among the other merry-makers, Constance and the count, who passed through the door, so near he could almost have touched her.

"Here she is," said the count, as they approached an elderly lady, seated near the edge of the balcony. "Ah, Madam," he continued to the latter, "if you would only use your good offices in my behalf! Miss Carew is cruelty itself."

"Why, what has she done?" asked the good gentlewoman.

"Insisted upon deserting the ball-room!"

"In my day," said the elderly ally of the nobleman, "you could not drag the young ladies from cotillion or minuet. And the men would stay till the dawn to toast them!"

"And I've no doubt, Madam, your name was often on their lips," returned the count gallantly, who evidently believed in the Spanish proverb: "Woo the duenna, not the maid; then in love the game's well played!"

The ally in his cause made some laughing response which the soldier did not hear. Himself unseen, Saint-Prosper bent his eyes upon the figure of the young girl, shadowy but obvious in the reflected light of the bright constellations. Even as he gazed, her hand removed the mask, revealing the face he knew so well. In the silence below, the fountain tinkled ever so loudly, as she stood, half-turned toward the garden, a silken head-covering around her shoulders; the head outlined

without adornment, save the poppies in her hair.

Her presence recalled scenes of other days: the drive from the races, when her eyes had beamed so softly beneath the starry luster. Did she remember? He dared not hope so; he did not. To him, it brought, also, harsher memories; yet his mind was filled most with her beauty, which appeared to gloss over all else and hold him, a not impassive spectator, to the place where she was standing. She seemed again Juliet--the Juliet of inns and school-house stages--the Juliet he had known before she had come to New Orleans, whose genius had transformed the barren stage into a garden of her own creation.

And yet something made her different; an indefinable new quality appeared to rest upon her. He felt his heart beating faster; he was glad he had come; for the moment he forgot his jealousy in watching her, as with new wealth of perfume, the languid breeze stirred the tresses above her pallid, immovable features. But the expression of confidence with which the count was regarding her, although ostensibly devoting himself to her companion, renewed his inquietude.

Had she allowed herself to be drawn into a promised alliance with that titled roué? Involuntarily the soldier's face grew hard and stern; the count's tactics were so apparent--flattering attention to the elderly gentlewoman and a devoted, but reserved, bearing toward the young girl in which he would rely upon patience and perseverance for the consummation of his wishes. But certainly Constance did not exhibit

marked preference for his society; on the contrary, she had hardly spoken to him since they had left the ball-room. Now clasping the iron railing of the balcony, she leaned farther out; the flowers of the vine, clambering up one of the supports, swayed gently around her, and she started at the moist caress on her bare arm.

"It is cold here," she said, drawing back.

"Allow me--your wrap!" exclaimed the count, springing to her side with great solicitude.

But she adjusted the garment without his assistance.

"You must be careful of your health--for the sake of your friends!" Accompanying the words with a significant glance.

"The count is right!" interposed the elderly gentlewoman. "As he usually is!" she added, laughing.

"Oh, Madam!" he said, bowing. "Miss Carew does not agree with you, I am sure?" Turning to the girl.

"I haven't given the matter any thought," she replied, coldly. She shivered slightly, nervously, and looked around.

At that moment the lights were turned on in the garden--another

surprise arranged by the Mistick Krewe!--illuminating trees and shrubbery, and casting a sudden glare upon the balcony.

"Bravo!" said the count. "It's like a fête-champêtre! And hear the mandolins! Tra-la-la-la-la! Why, what is it?"

She had given a sudden cry and stood staring toward the right at the back of the balcony. Within, the orchestra once more began to play, and, as the strains of music were wafted to them, a host of masqueraders started toward the ball-room. When the inflow of merry-makers had ceased, bewildered, trembling, she looked with blanched face toward the spot where the soldier had been standing, but he was gone.

At that moment the cathedral clock began to strike--twelve times it sounded, and, at the last stroke, the Mistick Krewe, one by one began to disappear, vanishing as mysteriously as they had come. Pluto, Proserpine, the Fates, fairies and harpies; Satan, Beelzebub; the dwellers in pandemonium; the aids to appetite--all took their quick departure, leaving the musicians and the guests of the evening, including the visiting military, to their own pleasures and devices. The first carnival had come to a close.

CHAPTER X

CONSTANCE AND THE SOLDIER

"Are you the clerk?" A well-modulated voice; a silvery crown of hair leaning over the counter of the St. Charles; blue eyes, lighted with unobtrusive inquiry.

The small, quiet-looking man addressed glanced up. "No," he said; "I am the proprietor. This"--waving his hand to a resplendent-appearing person--"is the clerk."

Whereupon the be-diamonded individual indicated (about whom an entire chapter has been written by an observing English traveler!) came forward leisurely; a Brummell in attire; an Aristarchus for taste! Since his period--or reign--there have been many imitators; but he was the first; indeed, created the office, and is deserving of a permanent place in American annals. "His formality just bordered on stiffness," wrote the interested Briton, as though he were studying some new example of the human species; "his conversation was elegant, but pointed, as he was gifted with a cultured economy of language. He accomplished by inflection what many people can only attain through volubility."

"Yes?" he interrogatively remarked, gazing down at the caller in the

present instance.

"Is Colonel Saint-Prosper stopping here?"

"Yes."

"Send this card to his room."

"Yes?" Doubtfully.

"Is there any reason why you shouldn't?"

"There was a military banquet last night," interposed the quiet, little man. "Patriotism bubbled over until morning."

"Ah, yes," commented Culver--for it was he--"fought their battles over again! Some of them in the hospital to-day! Well, well, they suffered in a glorious cause, toasting the president, and the army, and the flag, and the girls they left behind them! I read the account of it in the papers this morning. Grand speech of the bishop; glorious response of 'Old Rough and Ready'! You are right to protect sleeping heroes, but I'm afraid I must run the guard, as my business is urgent."

A few moments later the lawyer, breathing heavily, followed a colored lad down a crimson-carpeted corridor, pausing before a door upon which his guide knocked vigorously and then vanished.

"Colonel Saint-Prosper?" said the lawyer, as he obeyed the voice within and entered the room, where a tall young man in civilian attire was engaged in packing a small trunk. "One moment, pray--let me catch my breath. That lad accomplished the ascent two steps at a time, and, I fear, the spectacle stimulated me to unusual expedition. We're apt to forget we are old and can't keep up with boys and monkeys!"

During this somewhat playful introduction the attorney was studying the occupant of the room with keen, bright gaze; a glance which, without being offensive, was sufficiently penetrating and comprehensive to convey a definite impression of the other's face and figure. The soldier returned his visitor's look deliberately, but with no surprise.

"Won't you sit down?" he said.

Culver availed himself of the invitation. "I am not disturbing you? I have long known of you, although this is our first meeting."

"You have then the advantage of me," returned Saint-Prosper, "for I--"

"You never heard of me?" laughed the lawyer. "Exactly! We attorneys are always getting our fingers in every one's affairs! I am acquainted with you, as it were, from the cradle to the--present!"

"I am unexpectedly honored!" remarked the listener, satirically.

"First, I knew you through the Marquis de Ligne."

Saint-Prosper started and regarded his visitor more closely.

"I was the humble instrument of making a fortune for you; it was also my lot to draw up the papers depriving you of the same!" Culver laughed amiably. "'Oft expectation fails, where most it promises.' Pardon my levity! There were two wills; the first, in your favor; the last, in his daughter's. I presume"--with a sudden, sharp look--"you have no intention of contesting the final disposition? The paternity of the child is established beyond doubt."

Artful Culver was not by any means so sure in his own mind that, if the other were disposed to make trouble, the legal proofs of Constance's identity would be so easily forthcoming. Barnes was dead; her mother had passed away many years before; the child had been born in London--where?--the marquis' rationality, just before his demise, was a debatable question. In fact, since he had learned Saint-Prosper was in the city, the attorney's mind had been soaring among a cloud of vague possibilities, and now, regarding his companion with a most kindly, ingratiating smile, he added:

"Besides, when the marquis took you as a child into his household, there were, I understood, no legal papers drawn!"

"I don't see what your visit portends," said Saint-Prosper, "unless there is some other matter?"

"Just so," returned Culver, his doubts vanishing. "There was a small matter--a slight commission. Miss Carew requested me to hand you this message." The visitor now detected a marked change in the soldier's imperturbable bearing, as the latter took the envelope which the attorney offered him. "The young lady saw you at the Mistick Krewe ball last night, and, recognizing an old friend,"--with a slight accent--"pressed me into her service. And now, having completed my errand, I will wish you good-morning!" And the lawyer briskly departed.

The young man's hand trembled as he tore open the envelope, but he surveyed the contents of the brief message with tolerable firmness.

"COLONEL SAINT-PROSPER: Will you kindly call this morning to see me?

CONSTANCE CAREW."

That was all; nothing more, save the address and the date! How long he remained staring at it with mingled feelings he never knew, but finally with a start, looked at his watch, thoughtfully regarded the half-filled trunk, donned his coat and left the room. Several

fellow-officers, the first of the sluggards to appear, spoke to him as he crossed the hall below, but what they said or what he replied he could not afterward remember. Some one detained him at the steps, a gentleman with a longing for juleps, but finally he found himself in a carriage, driving somewhere, presumably to the address given in the letter. How long the drive seemed, and yet when the carriage finally stopped and he had paid his fare, he mentally determined it had been too short! The driver gazed in surprise after the gentleman, who did not wait for his change, but, forbearing injudicious comment, gathered up the reins and drove to the nearest café.

From the carriage the house was some distance, and yet it appeared very near the gate to the soldier, who dimly realized he was passing through a garden where were many flowering plants and where the air was unusually heavy with perfume. Many other details, the construction of the house, the size of the verandas, passed without attracting his notice. Soon, however, he was seated in a great room, an apartment of old-fashioned height and breadth. He felt his heart beating fast. How long did he sit there? No inconsiderable period, surely. He examined everything carefully, without carrying a definite impression of anything to his mind. The large, carved mirror; the quaint decoration of walls and frieze; the soft colors of the rug that covered the floor; the hundred and one odd little things in the cabinet near the chair where he was seated, trifles in ivory, old silver and china; the pictures, a Van Dyke, Claude, and a few modern masters. After this interminable, but confused scrutiny of inanimate things, his heart

beat faster still, as a tall figure, robed in white, entered the room!

He rose; they regarded each other with mutual constraint; her face had a bit of color, like the tinge of a rose-leaf; her eyes seemed agitated beneath the sweeping lashes, a sentiment in ill accord with the stateliness of her presence. She gave him her hand; he held it he knew not how long; probably, for the conventional moment. They found themselves, each in a chair; at ease, yet not at ease; he studying her face, furtively, yet eagerly; she turning in her fancy the first strong impression of how gaunt and haggard were his features, bearing the traces of recent illness!

"I am glad you came," she began, their eyes meeting once more.

He bowed. "Mr. Culver brought me your message."

"I heard that you--it was reported you were dead."

"I was wounded; that was all, and soon took to the field again."

The suspense that fell between them was oppressive.

"You should have let your friends--know," she said at length.

He looked at her curiously, vivid memories of their last interview

recurring to him. Indecisively she interlaced her fingers, and he, watching them, wondered why she had sent for him. Suddenly she rose, walked to the window, and stood, looking out. He, sitting in the dim light, in a maze of uncertainty, was vaguely conscious of her figure outlined against the brightness without; of the waving, yellow flowers of the vines on the veranda.

"It is long since we have met," he said, awkwardly.

She did not answer. Had she heard? Yet he did not resent her silence. If he had ever felt anger for her it had all vanished now. He was only conscious of regarding her more attentively, as she still remained, gazing out into the sunlit garden.

"Much has happened since I saw you," he continued.

She turned; her eyes were moist; her hand trembled a little against her dress, but she held her head proudly, as she had always done, and it was the aspect of this weakness set against strength that appealed swiftly to him, softening his heart so that he longed to spring to her side.

"Yes, much!" she replied.

Was her voice tremulous, or was it but the thrill of his own heart which made it seem so?

"You have been here long?" she asked, still holding back what was on her mind or blindly endeavoring to approach the subject.

"Only since yesterday."

"And you remain some time?"

"I am leaving to-day--for France."

At that a touch of color left her face, or was it that a darkening shadow fell upon the house and garden, momentarily chastening the outlook?

"For France?" she repeated.

Her lips quivered. Something seemed to still the beating of his heart.

"Constance--what is it?" he half-whispered.

She stepped forward suddenly, her hands outstretched.

"I wronged you!" she cried. "I wronged you. I thought the disgrace was yours. Oh, do not speak!" she added, passionately. "I have suffered for it--and now, would you mind--please--leaving me?"

"You thought the disgrace was mine!" he repeated, slowly. "Not my"--he broke off abruptly. "And you suffered--for it?" he said, wonderingly. "Then you--" He arose quickly and approached her, a new expression transfiguring his bronzed and worn young face.

Swiftly he sought her glance; her eyes gave irrefutable answer. Unresistingly, she abandoned herself to his arms, and he felt her bosom rise and fall with conflicting emotions. Closely he held her, in the surprise and surpassing pleasure of the moment; then, bending, he kissed her lips. A wave of color flooded her face, though her eyes still sought his. But even as he regarded her, the clear, open look gradually changed, replaced by one of half-perplexity, half-reproach.

"That night you went away--why did you not defend yourself?" she asked, finally.

"I never imagined--any mistake. Besides, what had I to offer? Your future was bright; your name, on every one's lips!"

"Did you think you were responsible for another's sins?"

His dark features clouded.

"I suppose I had become accustomed to cold looks. In Africa, by some of my comrades who had an inkling of the story! No matter what I did,

I was his brother! And the bitterest part was that I loved him; loved him from my boyhood! He was the handsomest, most joyous fellow! Even when he died in my arms in Mexico my heart could not absolutely turn from him."

She opened her lips as if to speak, but the shadow on his face kept her silent.

"I was weak enough to keep the story from you in the first place--a foolish reticence, for these matters follow a man to the ends of the world."

"Oh," she said, "to think it was I who made you feel this!"

He took her hand; his grasp hurt her fingers; yet she did not shrink.

"You showed me a new world," he answered, quickly. "Not the world I expected to find--where life would hold little of joy or zest--but a magical world; a beautiful world; yours!"

She half-hung her head. "But then--then--"

"It became a memory; bitter-sweet; yet more sweet than bitter!"

"And now?"

He did not answer immediately.

The figure of the count, as he had seen him the night before, had abruptly entered his mind. Did she understand? She smiled.

"And now?"

At her question he dismissed all thought of jealousy. Looking into her clear, half-laughing eyes, he read of no entangling alliances; without words from her, he understood.

"Shall we go into the garden?" she said, and, opening the window, they stepped out upon the veranda.

In the sky a single large cloud stretched itself in a dreamy torpor, too sluggish, apparently to move, while a brood of little clouds nestled and slept around it. From the window, the count's ally watched them, among the plants and vines, pausing now and then; their interest more in themselves than in the liveliest hues or forms that nature offered. He stood still, regarding his shadow on the path seriously.

"Nearly noon by the soldier's dial!" he said.

She pushed back the hair the wind had blown about her brow.

"My boat sails in an hour," he continued.

"But--you are not--going--now?"

"If I stay, it must be--"

"Forever!" she said. "Forever!"

* * * * *

"Have you heard the news?" said Susan to the count.

"Secular?" drawled the erstwhile emissary. He was in ill-humor, having called three times on Constance, who had been excused on all these occasions.

"Not necessarily," replied she, with the old familiar toss of the head. "Saint-Prosper has come back, and he's going to marry Constance!"

"Eh? What? I don't be--Who told you?" demanded the count, sharply.

"Well, you needn't take my head off! She did, if you want to know."

"Miss Carew?"

"Herself!"

The nobleman lolled back in his chair, a dark look on his face. Here were fine hopes gone a-glimmering!

"Pardie! the creditors will have to wait awhile," he thought. "And I--I have been a dunce, dancing attendance all these days! I had hoped to marry wealth and beauty. What did I come over here for? The demned country's barren of everything!"

"Isn't it delightful they should meet after such a long time?" rattled on Susan, gaily. "So romantic! And then they were exactly suited for each other. Dear me,"--enthusiastically--"I have taken such an interest in them, I almost feel as if I had brought it all about."

THE END