

The Professor

Charlotte Bronte

Chapter 19

NOVELISTS should never allow themselves to weary of the study of real life. If they observed this duty conscientiously, they would give us fewer pictures chequered with vivid contrasts of light and shade; they would seldom elevate their heroes and heroines to the heights of rapture—still seldomer sink them to the depths of despair; for if we rarely taste the fulness of joy in this life, we yet more rarely savour the acrid bitterness of hopeless anguish; unless, indeed, we have plunged like beasts into sensual indulgence, abused, strained, stimulated, again overstrained, and, at last, destroyed our faculties for enjoyment; then, truly, we may find ourselves without support, robbed of hope. Our agony is great, and how can it end? We have broken the spring of our powers; life must be all suffering—too feeble to conceive faith—death must be darkness—God, spirits, religion can have no place in our collapsed minds, where linger only hideous and polluting recollections of vice; and time brings us on to the brink of the grave, and dissolution flings us in—a rag eaten through and through with disease, wrung together with pain, stamped into the churchyard sod by the inexorable heel of despair.

But the man of regular life and rational mind never despairs. He loses his property—it is a blow—he staggers a moment; then, his energies, roused by the smart, are at work to seek a remedy; activity soon mitigates regret. Sickness affects him; he takes patience—endures what he cannot cure. Acute pain racks him; his writhing limbs know not where to find rest; he leans on Hope's anchors. Death takes from him what he loves; roots up, and tears violently away the stem round which his affections were twined—a dark, dismal time, a frightful wrench—but some morning Religion looks into his desolate house with sunrise, and says, that in another world, another life, he shall meet his kindred again. She speaks of that world as a place unsullied by sin—of that life, as an era unembittered by suffering; she mightily



strengthens her consolation by connecting with it two ideas—which mortals cannot comprehend, but on which they love to repose—Eternity, Immortality; and the mind of the mourner, being filled with an image, faint yet glorious, of heavenly hills all light and peace—of a spirit resting there in bliss—of a day when his spirit shall also alight there, free and disembodied—of a reunion perfected by love, purified from fear—he takes courage—goes out to encounter the necessities and discharge the duties of life; and, though sadness may never lift her burden from his mind, Hope will enable him to support it.

Well—and what suggested all this? and what is the inference to be drawn therefrom? What suggested it, is the circumstance of my best pupil—my treasure—being snatched from my hands, and put away out of my reach; the inference to be drawn from it is—that, being a steady, reasonable man, I did not allow the resentment, disappointment, and grief, engendered in my mind by this evil chance, to grow there to any monstrous size; nor did I allow them to monopolize the whole space of my heart; I pent them, on the contrary, in one strait and secret nook. In the daytime, too, when I was about my duties, I put them on the silent system; and it was only after I had closed the door of my chamber at night that I somewhat relaxed my severity towards these morose nurslings, and allowed vent to their language of murmurs; then, in revenge, they sat on my pillow, haunted my bed, and kept me awake with their long, midnight cry.

A week passed. I had said nothing more to Mdlle. Reuter. I had been calm in my demeanour to her, though stony cold and hard. When I looked at her, it was with the glance fitting to be bestowed on one who I knew had consulted jealousy as an adviser, and employed treachery as an instrument—the glance of quiet disdain and rooted distrust. On Saturday evening, ere I left the house, I stepped into the SALLE-A-MANGER, where she was sitting alone, and, placing myself before her, I asked, with the same tranquil tone and manner that I should have used had I put the question for the first time—

“Mademoiselle, will you have the goodness to give me the address of Frances Evans Henri?”

A little surprised, but not disconcerted, she smilingly disclaimed any knowledge of that address, adding, “Monsieur has perhaps forgotten that I explained all about that circumstance before—a week ago?”

“Mademoiselle,” I continued, “you would greatly oblige me by directing me to that young person’s abode.”



She seemed somewhat puzzled; and, at last, looking up with an admirably counterfeited air of naivete, she demanded, “Does Monsieur think I am telling an untruth?”

Still avoiding to give her a direct answer, I said, “It is not then your intention, mademoiselle, to oblige me in this particular?”

“But, monsieur, how can I tell you what I do not know?”

“Very well; I understand you perfectly, mademoiselle, and now I have only two or three words to say. This is the last week in July; in another month the vacation will commence I have the goodness to avail yourself of the leisure it will afford you to look out for another English master—at the close of August, I shall be under the necessity of resigning my post in your establishment.”

I did not wait for her comments on this announcement, but bowed and immediately withdrew.

That same evening, soon after dinner, a servant brought me a small packet; it was directed in a hand I knew, but had not hoped so soon to see again; being in my own apartment and alone, there was nothing to prevent my immediately opening it; it contained four five-franc pieces, and a note in English.

“MONSIEUR,

“I came to Mdlle. Reuter’s house yesterday, at the time when I knew you would be just about finishing your lesson, and I asked if I might go into the schoolroom and speak to you. Mdlle. Reuter came out and said you were already gone; it had not yet struck four, so I thought she must be mistaken, but concluded it would be vain to call another day on the same errand. In one sense a note will do as well—it will wrap up the 20 francs, the price of the lessons I have received from you; and if it will not fully express the thanks I owe you in addition—if it will not bid you good-bye as I could wish to have done—if it will not tell you, as I long to do, how sorry I am that I shall probably never see you more—why, spoken words would hardly be more adequate to the task. Had I seen you, I should probably have stammered out something feeble and unsatisfactory—something belying my feelings rather than explaining them; so it is perhaps as well that I was denied admission to your presence. You often remarked, monsieur, that my devoirs dwelt a great deal on fortitude in bearing grief—you said I introduced that theme too often: I find indeed that it is much easier to write about a severe duty than to perform it, for I am oppressed when I see and feel to what a reverse fate has condemned me; you were kind to me, monsieur—very kind; I am afflicted—I am heart-broken to be quite separated from you; soon I shall have no



friend on earth. But it is useless troubling you with my distresses. What claim have I on your sympathy? None; I will then say no more.

“Farewell, Monsieur.

“F. E. HENRI.”

I put up the note in my pocket-book. I slipped the five-franc pieces into my purse—then I took a turn through my narrow chamber.

“Mdlle. Reuter talked about her poverty,” said I, “and she is poor; yet she pays her debts and more. I have not yet given her a quarter’s lessons, and she has sent me a quarter’s due. I wonder of what she deprived herself to scrape together the twenty francs—I wonder what sort of a place she has to live in, and what sort of a woman her aunt is, and whether she is likely to get employment to supply the place she has lost. No doubt she will have to trudge about long enough from school to school, to inquire here, and apply there—be rejected in this place, disappointed in that. Many an evening she’ll go to her bed tired and unsuccessful. And the directress would not let her in to bid me good-bye? I might not have the chance of standing with her for a few minutes at a window in the schoolroom and exchanging some half-dozen of sentences—getting to know where she lived—putting matters in train for having all things arranged to my mind? No address on the note”—I continued, drawing it again from the pocket-book and examining it on each side of the two leaves: “women are women, that is certain, and always do business like women; men mechanically put a date and address to their communications. And these five-franc pieces?”—(I hauled them forth from my purse)—“if she had offered me them herself instead of tying them up with a thread of green silk in a kind of Lilliputian packet, I could have thrust them back into her little hand, and shut up the small, taper fingers over them—so—and compelled her shame, her pride, her shyness, all to yield to a little bit of determined Will—now where is she? How can I get at her?”

Opening my chamber door I walked down into the kitchen.

“Who brought the packet?” I asked of the servant who had delivered it to me.

“Un petit commissionaire, monsieur.”

“Did he say anything?”

“Rien.”

And I wended my way up the back-stairs, wondrously the wiser for my inquiries.

“No matter,” said I to myself, as I again closed the door. “No matter—I’ll seek her through Brussels.”



And I did. I sought her day by day whenever I had a moment's leisure, for four weeks; I sought her on Sundays all day long; I sought her on the Boulevards, in the Allee Verte, in the Park; I sought her in Ste. Gudule and St. Jacques; I sought her in the two Protestant chapels; I attended these latter at the German, French, and English services, not doubting that I should meet her at one of them. All my researches were absolutely fruitless; my security on the last point was proved by the event to be equally groundless with my other calculations. I stood at the door of each chapel after the service, and waited till every individual had come out, scrutinizing every gown draping a slender form, peering under every bonnet covering a young head. In vain; I saw girlish figures pass me, drawing their black scarfs over their sloping shoulders, but none of them had the exact turn and air of Mdlle. Henri's; I saw pale and thoughtful faces "encadrees" in bands of brown hair, but I never found her forehead, her eyes, her eyebrows. All the features of all the faces I met seemed frittered away, because my eye failed to recognize the peculiarities it was bent upon; an ample space of brow and a large, dark, and serious eye, with a fine but decided line of eyebrow traced above.

"She has probably left Brussels—perhaps is gone to England, as she said she would," muttered I inwardly, as on the afternoon of the fourth Sunday, I turned from the door of the chapel-royal which the door-keeper had just closed and locked, and followed in the wake of the last of the congregation, now dispersed and dispersing over the square. I had soon outwalked the couples of English gentlemen and ladies. (Gracious goodness! why don't they dress better? My eye is yet filled with visions of the high-flounced, slovenly, and tumbled dresses in costly silk and satin, of the large unbecoming collars in expensive lace; of the ill-cut coats and strangely fashioned pantaloons which every Sunday, at the English service, filled the choirs of the chapel-royal, and after it, issuing forth into the square, came into disadvantageous contrast with freshly and trimly attired foreign figures, hastening to attend salut at the church of Coburg.) I had passed these pairs of Britons, and the groups of pretty British children, and the British footmen and waiting-maids; I had crossed the Place Royale, and got into the Rue Royale, thence I had diverged into the Rue de Louvain—an old and quiet street. I remember that, feeling a little hungry, and not desiring to go back and take my share of the "gouter," now on the refectory-table at Pelet's—to wit,pistolets and water—I stepped into a baker's and refreshed myself on a COUC(?)—it is a Flemish word, I don't know how to spell it—A CORINTHE-ANGLICE, a currant bun—and a cup of coffee; and then I strolled on towards the Porte de

Louvain. Very soon I was out of the city, and slowly mounting the hill, which ascends from the gate, I took my time; for the afternoon, though cloudy, was very sultry, and not a breeze stirred to refresh the atmosphere. No inhabitant of Brussels need wander far to search for solitude; let him but move half a league from his own city and he will find her brooding still and blank over the wide fields, so drear though so fertile, spread out treeless and trackless round the capital of Brabant. Having gained the summit of the hill, and having stood and looked long over the cultured but lifeless campaign, I felt a wish to quit the high road, which I had hitherto followed, and get in among those tilled grounds—fertile as the beds of a Brobdignagian kitchen-garden—spreading far and wide even to the boundaries of the horizon, where, from a dusk green, distance changed them to a sullen blue, and confused their tints with those of the livid and thunderous-looking sky. Accordingly I turned up a by-path to the right; I had not followed it far ere it brought me, as I expected, into the fields, amidst which, just before me, stretched a long and lofty white wall enclosing, as it seemed from the foliage showing above, some thickly planted nursery of yew and cypress, for of that species were the branches resting on the pale parapets, and crowding gloomily about a massive cross, planted doubtless on a central eminence and extending its arms, which seemed of black marble, over the summits of those sinister trees. I approached, wondering to what house this well-protected garden appertained; I turned the angle of the wall, thinking to see some stately residence; I was close upon great iron gates; there was a hut serving for a lodge near, but I had no occasion to apply for the key—the gates were open; I pushed one leaf back—rain had rusted its hinges, for it groaned dolefully as they revolved. Thick planting embowered the entrance. Passing up the avenue, I saw objects on each hand which, in their own mute language, of inscription and sign, explained clearly to what abode I had made my way. This was the house appointed for all living; crosses, monuments, and garlands of everlastings announced, “The Protestant Cemetery, outside the gate of Louvain.”

The place was large enough to afford half an hour’s strolling without the monotony of treading continually the same path; and, for those who love to peruse the annals of graveyards, here was variety of inscription enough to occupy the attention for double or treble that space of time. Hither people of many kindreds, tongues, and nations, had brought their dead for interment; and here, on pages of stone, of marble, and of brass, were written names, dates, last tributes of pomp or love, in English, in French, in German, and Latin. Here the Englishman had erected a



marble monument over the remains of his Mary Smith or Jane Brown, and inscribed it only with her name. There the French widower had shaded the grave: of his Elmire or Celestine with a brilliant thicket of roses, amidst which a little tablet rising, bore an equally bright testimony to her countless virtues. Every nation, tribe, and kindred, mourned after its own fashion; and how soundless was the mourning of all! My own tread, though slow and upon smooth-rolled paths, seemed to startle, because it formed the sole break to a silence otherwise total. Not only the winds, but the very fitful, wandering airs, were that afternoon, as by common consent, all fallen asleep in their various quarters; the north was hushed, the south silent, the east sobbed not, nor did the west whisper. The clouds in heaven were condensed and dull, but apparently quite motionless. Under the trees of this cemetery nestled a warm breathless gloom, out of which the cypresses stood up straight and mute, above which the willows hung low and still; where the flowers, as languid as fair, waited listless for night dew or thunder-shower; where the tombs, and those they hid, lay impassible to sun or shadow, to rain or drought.

Importuned by the sound of my own footsteps, I turned off upon the turf, and slowly advanced to a grove of yews; I saw something stir among the stems; I thought it might be a broken branch swinging, my short-sighted vision had caught no form, only a sense of motion; but the dusky shade passed on, appearing and disappearing at the openings in the avenue. I soon discerned it was a living thing, and a human thing; and, drawing nearer, I perceived it was a woman, pacing slowly to and fro, and evidently deeming herself alone as I had deemed myself alone, and meditating as I had been meditating. Ere long she returned to a seat which I fancy she had but just quitted, or I should have caught sight of her before. It was in a nook, screened by a clump of trees; there was the white wall before her, and a little stone set up against the wall, and, at the foot of the stone, was an allotment of turf freshly turned up, a new-made grave. I put on my spectacles, and passed softly close behind her; glancing at the inscription on the stone, I read, "Julienne Henri, died at Brussels, aged sixty. August 10th, 18—." Having perused the inscription, I looked down at the form sitting bent and thoughtful just under my eyes, unconscious of the vicinity of any living thing; it was a slim, youthful figure in mourning apparel of the plainest black stuff, with a little simple, black crape bonnet; I felt, as well as saw, who it was; and, moving neither hand nor foot, I stood some moments enjoying the security of conviction. I had sought her for a month, and had never discovered one of her traces—never met a hope, or seized a chance of encountering her anywhere. I had



been forced to loosen my grasp on expectation; and, but an hour ago, had sunk slackly under the discouraging thought that the current of life, and the impulse of destiny, had swept her for ever from my reach; and, behold, while bending suddenly earthward beneath the pressure of despondency—while following with my eyes the track of sorrow on the turf of a graveyard—here was my lost jewel dropped on the tear-fed herbage, nestling in the messy and mouldy roots of yew-trees.

Frances sat very quiet, her elbow on her knee, and her head on her hand. I knew she could retain a thinking attitude a long time without change; at last, a tear fell; she had been looking at the name on the stone before her, and her heart had no doubt endured one of those constrictions with which the desolate living, regretting the dead, are, at times, so sorely oppressed. Many tears rolled down, which she wiped away, again and again, with her handkerchief; some distressed sobs escaped her, and then, the paroxysm over, she sat quiet as before. I put my hand gently on her shoulder; no need further to prepare her, for she was neither hysterical nor liable to fainting-fits; a sudden push, indeed, might have startled her, but the contact of my quiet touch merely woke attention as I wished; and, though she turned quickly, yet so lightning-swift is thought—in some minds especially—I believe the wonder of what—the consciousness of who it was that thus stole unawares on her solitude, had passed through her brain, and flashed into her heart, even before she had effected that hasty movement; at least, Amazement had hardly opened her eyes and raised them to mine, ere Recognition informed their irids with most speaking brightness. Nervous surprise had hardly discomposed her features ere a sentiment of most vivid joy shone clear and warm on her whole countenance. I had hardly time to observe that she was wasted and pale, ere called to feel a responsive inward pleasure by the sense of most full and exquisite pleasure glowing in the animated flush, and shining in the expansive light, now diffused over my pupil's face. It was the summer sun flashing out after the heavy summer shower; and what fertilizes more rapidly than that beam, burning almost like fire in its ardour?

I hate boldness—that boldness which is of the brassy brow and insensate nerves; but I love the courage of the strong heart, the fervour of the generous blood; I loved with passion the light of Frances Evans' clear hazel eye when it did not fear to look straight into mine; I loved the tones with which she uttered the words—

“Mon maitre! mon maitre!”

I loved the movement with which she confided her hand to my hand; I loved her as she stood there, penniless and parentless; for a sensualist charmless, for me a



treasure—my best object of sympathy on earth, thinking such thoughts as I thought, feeling such feelings as I felt; my ideal of the shrine in which to seal my stores of love; personification of discretion and forethought, of diligence and perseverance, of self-denial and self-control —those guardians, those trusty keepers of the gift I longed to confer on her—the gift of all my affections; model of truth and honour, of independence and conscientiousness—those refiners and sustainers of an honest life; silent possessor of a well of tenderness, of a flame, as genial as still, as pure as quenchless, of natural feeling, natural passion—those sources of refreshment and comfort to the sanctuary of home. I knew how quietly and how deeply the well bubbled in her heart; I knew how the more dangerous flame burned safely under the eye of reason; I had seen when the fire shot up a moment high and vivid, when the accelerated heat troubled life's current in its channels; I had seen reason reduce the rebel, and humble its blaze to embers. I had confidence in Frances Evans; I had respect for her, and as I drew her arm through mine, and led her out of the cemetery, I felt I had another sentiment, as strong as confidence, as firm as respect, more fervid than either—that of love.

“Well, my pupil,” said I, as the ominous sounding gate swung to behind us—
“Well, I have found you again: a month's search has seemed long, and I little thought to have discovered my lost sheep straying amongst graves.”

Never had I addressed her but as “Mademoiselle” before, and to speak thus was to take up a tone new to both her and me. Her answer surprised me that this language ruffled none of her feelings, woke no discord in her heart:-

“Mon maitre,” she said, “have you troubled yourself to seek me? I little imagined you would think much of my absence, but I grieved bitterly to be taken away from you. I was sorry for that circumstance when heavier troubles ought to have made me forget it.”

“Your aunt is dead?”

“Yes, a fortnight since, and she died full of regret, which I could not chase from her mind; she kept repeating, even during the last night of her existence, ‘Frances, you will be so lonely when I am gone, so friendless:’ she wished too that she could have been buried in Switzerland, and it was I who persuaded her in her old age to leave the banks of Lake Lemman, and to come, only as it seems to die, in this flat region of Flanders. Willingly would I have observed her last wish, and taken her remains back to our own country, but that was impossible; I was forced to lay her here.”



“She was ill but a short time, I presume?”

“But three weeks. When she began to sink I asked Mdlle. Reuter’s leave to stay with her and wait on her; I readily got leave.”

“Do you return to the pensionnat!” I demanded hastily.

“Monsieur, when I had been at home a week Mdlle. Reuter called one evening, just after I had got my aunt to bed; she went into her room to speak to her, and was extremely civil and affable, as she always is; afterwards she came and sat with me a long time, and just as she rose to go away, she said: “Mademoiselle, I shall not soon cease to regret your departure from my establishment, though indeed it is true that you have taught your class of pupils so well that they are all quite accomplished in the little works you manage so skilfully, and have not the slightest need of further instruction; my second teacher must in future supply your place, with regard to the younger pupils, as well as she can, though she is indeed an inferior artiste to you, and doubtless it will be your part now to assume a higher position in your calling; I am sure you will everywhere find schools and families willing to profit by your talents.’ And then she paid me my last quarter’s salary. I asked, as mademoiselle would no doubt think, very bluntly, if she designed to discharge me from the establishment. She smiled at my inelegance of speech, and answered that ‘our connection as employer and employed was certainly dissolved, but that she hoped still to retain the pleasure of my acquaintance; she should always be happy to see me as a friend;’ and then she said something about the excellent condition of the streets, and the long continuance of fine weather, and went away quite cheerful.”

I laughed inwardly; all this was so like the directress—so like what I had expected and guessed of her conduct; and then the exposure and proof of her lie, unconsciously afforded by Frances:—“She had frequently applied for Mdlle. Henri’s address,” forsooth; “Mdlle. Henri had always evaded giving it,” &c., &c., and here I found her a visitor at the very house of whose locality she had professed absolute ignorance!

Any comments I might have intended to make on my pupil’s communication, were checked by the plashing of large rain-drops on our faces and on the path, and by the muttering of a distant but coming storm. The warning obvious in stagnant air and leaden sky had already induced me to take the road leading back to Brussels, and now I hastened my own steps and those of my companion, and, as our way lay downhill, we got on rapidly. There was an interval after the fall of the first broad

drops before heavy rain came on; in the meantime we had passed through the Porte de Louvain, and were again in the city.

“Where do you live?” I asked; “I will see you safe home,”

“Rue Notre Dame aux Neiges,” answered Frances.

It was not far from the Rue de Louvain, and we stood on the doorsteps of the house we sought ere the clouds, severing with loud peal and shattered cataract of lightning, emptied their livid folds in a torrent, heavy, prone, and broad.

“Come in! come in!” said Frances, as, after putting her into the house, I paused ere I followed: the word decided me; I stepped across the threshold, shut the door on the rushing, flashing, whitening storm, and followed her upstairs to her apartments. Neither she nor I were wet; a projection over the door had warded off the straight-descending flood; none but the first, large drops had touched our garments; one minute more and we should not have had a dry thread on us.

Stepping over a little mat of green wool, I found myself in a small room with a painted floor and a square of green carpet in the middle; the articles of furniture were few, but all bright and exquisitely clean; order reigned through its narrow limits—such order as it soothed my punctilious soul to behold. And I had hesitated to enter the abode, because I apprehended after all that Mdlle. Reuter’s hint about its extreme poverty might be too well-founded, and I feared to embarrass the lace-mender by entering her lodgings unawares! Poor the place might be; poor truly it was; but its neatness was better than elegance, and had but a bright little fire shone on that clean hearth, I should have deemed it more attractive than a palace. No fire was there, however, and no fuel laid ready to light; the lace-mender was unable to allow herself that indulgence, especially now when, deprived by death of her sole relative, she had only her own unaided exertions to rely on. Frances went into an inner room to take off her bonnet, and she came out a model of frugal neatness, with her well-fitting black stuff dress, so accurately defining her elegant bust and taper waist, with her spotless white collar turned back from a fair and shapely neck, with her plenteous brown hair arranged in smooth bands on her temples, and in a large Grecian plait behind: ornaments she had none—neither brooch, ring, nor ribbon; she did well enough without them—perfection of fit, proportion of form, grace of carriage, agreeably supplied their place. Her eye, as she re-entered the small sitting-room, instantly sought mine, which was just then lingering on the hearth; I knew she read at once the sort of inward ruth and pitying pain which the chill vacancy of that hearth stirred in my soul: quick to penetrate, quick to determine, and quicker

to put in practice, she had in a moment tied a holland apron round her waist; then she disappeared, and reappeared with a basket; it had a cover; she opened it, and produced wood and coal; deftly and compactly she arranged them in the grate.

“It is her whole stock, and she will exhaust it out of hospitality,” thought I.

“What are you going to do?” I asked: “not surely to light a fire this hot evening? I shall be smothered.”

“Indeed, monsieur, I feel it very chilly since the rain began; besides, I must boil the water for my tea, for I take tea on Sundays; you will be obliged to try and bear the heat.”

She had struck a light; the wood was already in a blaze; and truly, when contrasted with the darkness, the wild tumult of the tempest without, that peaceful glow which began to beam on the now animated hearth, seemed very cheering. A low, purring sound, from some quarter, announced that another being, besides myself, was pleased with the change; a black cat, roused by the light from its sleep on a little cushioned foot-stool, came and rubbed its head against Frances’ gown as she knelt; she caressed it, saying it had been a favourite with her “pauvre tante Julienne.”

The fire being lit, the hearth swept, and a small kettle of a very antique pattern, such as I thought I remembered to have seen in old farmhouses in England, placed over the now ruddy flame, Frances’ hands were washed, and her apron removed in an instant then she opened a cupboard, and took out a tea-tray, on which she had soon arranged a china tea-equipage, whose pattern, shape, and size, denoted a remote antiquity; a little, old-fashioned silver spoon was deposited in each saucer; and a pair of silver tongs, equally old-fashioned, were laid on the sugar-basin; from the cupboard, too, was produced a tidy silver cream-ewer, not larger than an egg-shell. While making these preparations, she chanced to look up, and, reading curiosity in my eyes, she smiled and asked—

“Is this like England, monsieur?”

“Like the England of a hundred years ago,” I replied.

“Is it truly? Well, everything on this tray is at least a hundred years old: these cups, these spoons, this ewer, are all heirlooms; my great-grandmother left them to my grandmother, she to my mother, and my mother brought them with her from England to Switzerland, and left them to me; and, ever since I was a little girl, I have thought I should like to carry them back to England, whence they came.”

She put some pistols on the table; she made the tea, as foreigners do make tea—i.e., at the rate of a teaspoonful to half-a-dozen cups; she placed me a chair, and, as I took it, she asked, with a sort of exaltation—

“Will it make you think yourself at home for a moment?”

“If I had a home in England, I believe it would recall it,” I answered; and, in truth, there was a sort of illusion in seeing the fair-complexioned English-looking girl presiding at the English meal, and speaking in the English language.

“You have then no home?” was her remark.

“None, nor ever have had. If ever I possess a home, it must be of my own making, and the task is yet to begin.” And, as I spoke, a pang, new to me, shot across my heart: it was a pang of mortification at the humility of my position, and the inadequacy of my means; while with that pang was born a strong desire to do more, earn more, be more, possess more; and in the increased possessions, my roused and eager spirit panted to include the home I had never had, the wife I inwardly vowed to win.

Frances’ tea was little better than hot water, sugar, and milk; and her pistols, with which she could not offer me butter, were sweet to my palate as manna.

The repast over, and the treasured plate and porcelain being washed and put by, the bright table rubbed still brighter, “*le chat de ma tante Julienne*” also being fed with provisions brought forth on a plate for its special use, a few stray cinders, and a scattering of ashes too, being swept from the hearth, Frances at last sat down; and then, as she took a chair opposite to me, she betrayed, for the first time, a little embarrassment; and no wonder, for indeed I had unconsciously watched her rather too closely, followed all her steps and all her movements a little too perseveringly with my eyes, for she mesmerized me by the grace and alertness of her action—by the deft, cleanly, and even decorative effect resulting from each touch of her slight and fine fingers; and when, at last, she subsided to stillness, the intelligence of her face seemed beauty to me, and I dwelt on it accordingly. Her colour, however, rising, rather than settling with repose, and her eyes remaining downcast, though I kept waiting for the lids to be raised that I might drink a ray of the light I loved—a light where fire dissolved in softness, where affection tempered penetration, where, just now at least, pleasure played with thought—this expectation not being gratified, I began at last to suspect that I had probably myself to blame for the disappointment; I must cease gazing, and begin talking, if I wished to break the spell under which she



now sat motionless; so recollecting the composing effect which an authoritative tone and manner had ever been wont to produce on her, I said—

“Get one of your English books, mademoiselle, for the rain yet falls heavily, and will probably detain me half an hour longer.

Released, and set at ease, up she rose, got her book, and accepted at once the chair I placed for her at my side. She had selected “Paradise Lost” from her shelf of classics, thinking, I suppose, the religious character of the book best adapted it to Sunday; I told her to begin at the beginning, and while she read Milton’s invocation to that heavenly muse, who on the “secret top of Oreb or Sinai” had taught the Hebrew shepherd how in the womb of chaos, the conception of a world had originated and ripened, I enjoyed, undisturbed, the treble pleasure of having her near me, hearing the sound of her voice—a sound sweet and satisfying in my ear—and looking, by intervals, at her face: of this last privilege, I chiefly availed myself when I found fault with an intonation, a pause, or an emphasis; as long as I dogmatized, I might also gaze, without exciting too warm a flush.

“Enough,” said I, when she had gone through some half dozen pages (a work of time with her, for she read slowly and paused often to ask and receive information)—“enough; and now the rain is ceasing, and I must soon go.” For indeed, at that moment, looking towards the window, I saw it all blue; the thunder-clouds were broken and scattered, and the setting August sun sent a gleam like the reflection of rubies through the lattice. I got up; I drew on my gloves.

“You have not yet found another situation to supply the place of that from which you were dismissed by Mdlle. Reuter?”

“No, monsieur; I have made inquiries everywhere, but they all ask me for references; and to speak truth, I do not like to apply to the directress, because I consider she acted neither justly nor honourably towards me; she used underhand means to set my pupils against me, and thereby render me unhappy while I held my place in her establishment, and she eventually deprived me of it by a masked and hypocritical manoeuvre, pretending that she was acting for my good, but really snatching from me my chief means of subsistence, at a crisis when not only my own life, but that of another, depended on my exertions: of her I will never more ask a favour.”

“How, then, do you propose to get on? How do you live now?”

“I have still my lace-mending trade; with care it will keep me from starvation, and I doubt not by dint of exertion to get better employment yet; it is only a fortnight since I began to try; my courage or hopes are by no means worn out yet.”

“And if you get what you wish, what then? what are? your ultimate views?”

“To save enough to cross the Channel: I always look to England as my Canaan.”

“Well, well—ere long I shall pay you another visit; good evening now,” and I left her rather abruptly; I had much ado to resist a strong inward impulse, urging me to take a warmer, more expressive leave: what so natural as to fold her for a moment in a close embrace, to imprint one kiss on her cheek or forehead? I was not unreasonable—that was all I wanted; satisfied in that point, I could go away content; and Reason denied me even this; she ordered me to turn my eyes from her face, and my steps from her apartment—to quit her as dryly and coldly as I would have quitted old Madame Pelet. I obeyed, but I swore rancorously to be avenged one day. “I’ll earn a right to do as I please in this matter, or I’ll die in the contest. I have one object before me now—to get that Genevese girl for my wife; and my wife she shall be—that is, provided she has as much, or half as much regard for her master as he has for her. And would she be so docile, so smiling, so happy under my instructions if she had not? would she sit at my side when I dictate or correct, with such a still, contented, halcyon mien?” for I had ever remarked, that however sad or harassed her countenance might be when I entered a room, yet after I had been near her, spoken to her a few words, given her some directions, uttered perhaps some reproofs, she would, all at once, nestle into a nook of happiness, and look up serene and revived. The reproofs suited her best of all: while I scolded she would chip away with her pen-knife at a pencil or a pen; fidgetting a little, pouting a little, defending herself by monosyllables, and when I deprived her of the pen or pencil, fearing it would be all cut away, and when I interdicted even the monosyllabic defence, for the purpose of working up the subdued excitement a little higher, she would at last raise her eyes and give me a certain glance, sweetened with gaiety, and pointed with defiance, which, to speak truth, thrilled me as nothing had ever done, and made me, in a fashion (though happily she did not know it), her subject, if not her slave. After such little scenes her spirits would maintain their flow, often for some hours, and, as I remarked before, her health therefrom took a sustenance and vigour which, previously to the event of her aunt’s death and her dismissal, had almost recreated her whole frame.

It has taken me several minutes to write these last sentences; but I had thought all their purport during the brief interval of descending the stairs from Frances’ room. Just as I was opening the outer door, I remembered the twenty francs which I had not restored; I paused: impossible to carry them away with me; difficult to force them

back on their original owner; I had now seen her in her own humble abode, witnessed the dignity of her poverty, the pride of order, the fastidious care of conservatism, obvious in the arrangement and economy of her little home; I was sure she would not suffer herself to be excused paying her debts; I was certain the favour of indemnity would be accepted from no hand, perhaps least of all from mine: yet these four five-franc pieces were a burden to my self-respect, and I must get rid of them. An expedient—a clumsy one no doubt, but the best I could devise—suggested itself to me. I darted up the stairs, knocked, re-entered the room as if in haste:—

“Mademoiselle, I have forgotten one of my gloves; I must have left it here.”

She instantly rose to seek it; as she turned her back, I—being now at the hearth—noiselessly lifted a little vase, one of a set of china ornaments, as old-fashioned as the tea-cups—slipped the money under it, then saying—“Oh here is my glove! I had dropped it within the fender; good evening, mademoiselle,” I made my second exit.

Brief as my impromptu return had been, it had afforded me time to pick up a heart-ache; I remarked that Frances had already removed the red embers of her cheerful little fire from the grate: forced to calculate every item, to save in every detail, she had instantly on my departure retrenched a luxury too expensive to be enjoyed alone.

“I am glad it is not yet winter,” thought I; “but in two months more come the winds and rains of November; would to God that before then I could earn the right, and the power, to shovel coals into that grate AD LIBITUM!”

Already the pavement was drying; a balmy and fresh breeze stirred the air, purified by lightning; I felt the West behind me, where spread a sky like opal; azure immingled with crimson: the enlarged sun, glorious in Tyrian tints, dipped his brim already; stepping, as I was, eastward, I faced a vast bank of clouds, but also I had before me the arch of an evening rainbow; a perfect rainbow—high, wide, vivid. I looked long; my eye drank in the scene, and I suppose my brain must have absorbed it; for that night, after lying awake in pleasant fever a long time, watching the silent sheet-lightning, which still played among the retreating clouds, and flashed silvery over the stars, I at last fell asleep; and then in a dream were reproduced the setting sun, the bank of clouds, the mighty rainbow. I stood, methought, on a terrace; I leaned over a parapeted wall; there was space below me, depth I could not fathom, but hearing an endless dash of waves, I believed it to be the sea; sea spread to the horizon; sea of changeful green and intense blue: all was soft in the distance; all vapour-veiled. A spark of gold glistened on the line between water and air, floated up,



approached, enlarged, changed; the object hung midway between heaven and earth, under the arch of the rainbow; the soft but dusk clouds diffused behind. It hovered as on wings; pearly, fleecy, gleaming air streamed like raiment round it; light, tinted with carnation, coloured what seemed face and limbs; A large star shone with still lustre on an angel's forehead; an upraised arm and hand, glancing like a ray, pointed to the bow overhead, and a voice in my heart whispered—

“Hope smiles on Effort!”

