

the man who lay dying just beyond the partition, and who, during their whole married life, had never shown her any affection, but who, on the contrary, had treated her with a coldness that amounted at times almost to brutality.

'Mother! Is he?' cried Henri again, advancing and shaking her hand. 'While there's life there's hope.'

'Hope!' she repeated. 'Hope! There is no such thing as hope for us. Heaven knows that it is not of myself, but of you that I think. How will you, who have been brought up as you have, bear—'

Suddenly she stopped, and, snatching away her hand, which had rested passively in Henri's clasp, she burst into a horrible mirthless laugh, which made both her listeners shiver.

'There, there!' she said. 'I don't know what I am saying. It is so sudden, Henri, you know—so sudden—so sudden.'

As she spoke, she caught up her heavy train in one hand, and waving the other vacantly, she tottered, rather than walked, from the study, and at another moment, the door of her own apartment, across the hall, was heard to close.

'Poor woman! Poor woman!' said the doctor, 'she is completely unstrung. There is no cause for anxiety, my boy; it is but natural that it should be so. The shock has proved too much for her.'

All that evening, as Henri sat by the bedside of his father, who had again lapsed into unconsciousness, his brain was like a kaleidoscope, in the constant shifting of his thoughts from one thing to another. His love for Marcelle, her acceptance of that love, Madame Charteris's consent, the Baron Chevrial and his newly made bride, his father's sudden seizure, all these things crossed and recrossed each other in a sort of fantastical dance through his wearied head; but the thing that troubled him the most and to which he returned again and again, without obtaining any satisfactory solution, was his mother's strange behaviour. It was impossible that his father's sudden seizure could be the cause of it; she had long ceased to feel any affection for him, and, although, as the doctor had said, it was undoubtedly a great shock to her, that would not in itself account for her extraordinary emotion.

Worn out with vain speculation, Henri at last threw himself down on the sofa, leaving the doctor and Francois to watch beside the sick bed, and soon, overcome by the varied emotions of the day, fell into a deep slumber.

About three o'clock in the morning he was roused by the doctor. A decided change for the worse had taken place. Madame de Targy, looking much more composed, stood at the head of the bed, and Henri went to her side, and together they awaited the approach of the mysterious angel.

Monsieur de Targy never recovered consciousness, but, as the first rays of the rising sun gilded the waking world, he breathed his last, dying, as he had lived, unloving and unloved. If it be true that a man's place in this world is measured by the void he leaves behind him, it would be difficult to discover the benefit of this man's life.

CHAPTER III.

THE DE TARGY'S BALL.

THE apartment, *au premier*, No. 67 Avenue de l'Alma, near the Arc de Triomphe, was ablaze with light; carriage after carriage load of ladies in wonderfully concocted masses of satin, tulle, and lace, with their attendant cavaliers in black coats and white cravats, was deposited beneath the red and white striped awning stretched across the sidewalk; bursts of music floated now and then down from the windows, and all was gayety and laughter. For, to-night, Monsieur and Madame Henri de Targy were giving a grand ball to celebrate their return to the world, after two years of mourning.

The event was one of more than usual interest, moreover, as it was young Madame de Targy's debut in Parisian society. Since her marriage, which had been solemnized very quietly about six months after the death of her husband's father, she had lived in the country, seeing no society beyond the few families in the neighbourhood, and Dr. Chesnel, an old friend of the De Targy's. At last, however, the period of mourning was terminated, and, at the special request of Madame de Targy the elder, the family had returned to Paris, and the young wife was to assume the place in society to which her husband's wealth and position entitled her.

Rumours of her exceeding beauty had reached the metropolis, in spite of her seclusion at Sainte Roche, and it was whispered that Juliani, the famous tenor of the Italians, had declared her voice to be phenomenal. All this was sufficient to cause considerable curiosity to see her, and there were very few regrets to the invitations to the ball.

In one of the ante-chambers leading from the grand salon were gathered together two or three of the *jeunesse doree* of the gay

capital, irreproachably attired from the tips of their patent-leather shoes to the crown of their carefully brushed heads. One, a young fellow of not more than two and twenty, but with the *blaise* look, real or affected, of a man of fifty who had completely exhausted life, reclined with half-closed eyes in a low arm-chair, while his companions applauded with cries of 'Brava! Brava!' a duo, which had just been sung in the next room, by the mistress of the house and her teacher, Signor Juliani.

'That was really admirable,' said one, as the applause died away. 'Very good, quite remarkable. The little woman has much talent, has she not, Tirandei?'

The one addressed as Tirandei opened his eyes, stared for a moment at the speaker, and then, as if the effort to speak was really too much for him, made a feeble motion of the head in token of assent.

'Tirandei!' indignantly ejaculated his friend, whose name was Laubanere, and who was a successful young broker on the Bourse. 'How can you be so apathetic when such music is going on? Have you no soul?'

'Soul!' drawled Tirandei, without moving a muscle or in the slightest degree altering his comfortable position. Don't know. Have a body.'

Laubanere laughed. 'Well, at all events, your body is in a very bad attitude for a ball, you know.'

'Tired!' and the tone of his voice was in accordance with his words.

'But, tell me,' said Laubanere, approaching and leaning over the back of his chair, 'how happens it that you once more shed the light of your countenance upon society?'

'Must go somewhere.'

'You have the club.'

'Bored me. Stopped smoking.'

'Poor fellow! But I say, Tirandei.'

Tirandei moved slightly, and then said, with as much impatience as his laziness, real or assumed, would allow him to exhibit:

'Don't yell! Nerves.'

'But, my dear fellow, you don't know what you are missing. The rooms are full of pretty women, I assure you.'

'All the same to me.'

'Hear him, Vauxmartin,' laughed Laubanere, turning to a third young man, who had approached to listen to the colloquy. 'Did you ever see such a fellow?'

Vauxmartin was evidently not a man to have much sympathy with Tirandei's lackadaisical air, if sure they were. He was one of those men, by no means infrequent in society, who have sprung from no one knows where and who by push and wile-pulling have managed to obtain a foothold and keep it.

'What is the matter with you, Tirandei?'

he asked, in a voice as rasping as a saw.

'Blaze! Worn-out!' murmured Tirandei, softly.

'The devil! Don't you do anything for it?'

'Trying water cure.'

'Has it done you any good?'

Tirandei shrugged his shoulders, or rather made a weak movement that was meant to be a shrug.

'Not much, evidently,' said Vauxmartin.

'Think I'm a little better.'

Both his companions roared.

'Great heaven!' exclaimed Laubanere.

'What must you have been before you tried it?'

'How are you, Laubanere?' said a voice from the door-way. 'Good-evening, Monsieur Vauxmartin.'

Laubanere started, and turning, bowed obsequiously.

'Good-evening, baron,' he replied, in response to the salutation of the newcomer.

We have already caught a glimpse of Baron Chevrial at the church door in Sainte Roche, but in the last two years, he has altered somewhat and not for the better. His face is thinner, and the cheeks, in spite of their rather too brilliant colouring, look sunken. The little eyes, beneath the carefully pencilled brows, are dull and fishy, and below them are puffed ridges which no art can conceal. His hair, however, is quite as thick and black as ever. It has long been a matter of hot discussion in club and boulevard whether the baron's misfortune is due to nature or a very skillful wig-maker, but the question has never yet been satisfactorily solved.

The baron advanced into the room, dangling in one hand a monocle, attached by a thin gold chain to the lapel of his vest, and stroking with the other his slender moustache which was waxed into two stiff points and turned straight up from the corners of his mouth—a mouth, by the way, which would not have met with favour from physiognomists, the upper lip being thin and bloodless, and the lower heavy, protruding, and of a deep purplish hue.

Every detail of his dress was perfection. The cut of his evening coat, with its single gardenia in the button-hole, was a model, and the set of the white expanse of his shirt front, Beau Brummel or the Count d'

Orsay, had those worthies lived in these days, would have envied.

'How are you, dear boy?' said the baron, addressing young Tirandei with a familiar pat on the shoulder, as if the young man had been one of his own contemporaries.

'You are late, baron,' observed Laubanere, deferentially.

Baron Chevrial was one of the kings of the Bourse, and it behoved the young broker to court his favour.

'Yes, yes. I was detained at the opera; behind the scenes, *rien entendu*,' with a sly wink and an unctuous chuckle. 'But what has been going on here? Whom were they applauding as I came up the stairs?'

'The mistress of the house, Madame de Targy,' replied Laubanere, 'who has been singing with Juliani.'

'With Juliani, the tenor?'

'Yes.'

'Ah!' was the baron's answer, but there was a world of disagreeable innuendo in the long drawn out monosyllable.

Laubanere and Vauxmartin laughed as in duty bound. The old relations of patron and client still exist in these modern days, though perhaps less openly than in antiquity.

As for Tirandei, for the first time during the evening, he showed some signs of intelligence. An expression of disgust at the baron's implication swept over his handsome face, and he said in a way which showed that beneath all his laziness and indifference, there lurked the instincts of a gentleman.

Madame de Targy bears a spotless reputation, Juliani has been giving her lessons.

'Oh!' retorted Chevrial, with a half-sneer. 'Behold our friend, Tirandei, in a new character, that of knight-errand. Well, all I can say is, that I envy Monsieur Juliani.'

'I must tell you, my dear baron,' interrupted Laubanere, quickly, 'that Madame Chevrial accompanied them charmingly.'

'My wife!' remarked Chevrial, indifferently. 'That does not astonish me; she is a very fine pianist, my wife. She possesses all accomplishments. But, tell me, with more animation, 'Has Madame de Targy any talent? I have never heard her.'

'Yes, much talent.'

'Of the first order, my dear baron, of the first order!' declared Vauxmartin. 'A superb voice! That young woman has a hundred thousand francs in her throat.'

This opinion was announced in the tone of a priest of Apollo, delivering an oracle, which there is no gaining. Monsieur Vauxmartin believed that if you only speak loudly and authoritatively enough, the majority of people will listen to you and accept what you say as truth, and he carried this belief into all the actions of his life.

But be found now, as he had on more than one previous occasion, the baron an exception to the majority.

'A hundred thousand francs in the throat—bah!' was Chevrial's comprehensive comment.

'I assure you, baron, that she sings very well,' replied Vauxmartin. 'She is a great artist.'

'The baron smiled in pitying disdain.

'Yes, in a drawing-room,' he said, sweetly. 'I have no doubt of it. It is like society amateurs playing a comedy; in private, it is charming, but, on the stage of a theatre, it would be something quite different.'

'Yes, indeed, baron, that is true,' remarked Laubanere, who was always too ready to agree with the man of success.

But Vauxmartin was too self-opinionated to relinquish the point, and, besides, he rarely had dealings on the Bourse.

'I beg to differ with you, gentlemen,' he persisted. 'You can believe me or not, as you like, but no later than night before last I heard, in a parlour, some society people play one of De Muesse's pieces, and I assure you that those ladies and gentlemen, simple amateurs as they were, would not have been out of place.'

At the Theatre-Francaise, I suppose, dear boy,' interrupted the baron. 'Is that what you were going to say?'

Vauxmartin hesitated a moment.

'Well, yes, he said, boldly, determined not to abate an inch of his position, 'certainly, at the Theatre-Francaise.'

Even Tirandei laughed at this.

'Well,' said the baron, 'whether she has a voice for the stage or a voice for the parlor, the little woman is devilish pretty. She has a figure which would tempt an anchorite.'

And adjusting his monocle, with a hand which a close observer would have perceived was just the least little bit tremulous, the baron cast upon the lady under discussion, who was standing just beyond the arched door-way, such a look as a Satyr might have bent upon a nymph he had discovered bathing in some woodland stream.

'Really, it is incredible,' he murmured, 'how she appeals to my imagination.'

The young mistress of the house, accompanied by half-a-dozen of her guests, among whom were her aunt, Madame Charteris, and our old friend, Doctor Chesnel, entered the room.

Very lovely was Marcelle in a Worth gown of silver tissue and a white satin train embroidered with golden lilies. Upon her arm and neck, as polished as marble, gleamed diamonds and sapphires, and above the rippling masses of her bronzed hair was poised an exquisite, jewelled butterfly.

'The excitement had flushed her delicately moulded cheeks,' and lent an additional brightness to her dark brown eyes.

After acknowledging the salutes of the four gentlemen, whose conversation she had been listening to, she turned to her aunt, and said, smilingly, evidently in reply to some remark just made:

'Then you really think that I have made progress?'

'Prodigious, my dear, prodigious,' replied Madame Charteris, whose more than plump figure was tightly compressed in a gorgeous costume of scarlet and black, and whose good-humoured face beamed with pleasure at the success of her niece. 'Your voice is now simply perfection.'

'You really made me shed tears,' observed Madame de Luce, a pretty young woman, whose elderly husband had considerably died a few years before and left her in possession of an ample income.

'You have the golden voice of Patti,' said Vauxmartin, in his loud voice.

'With a suggestion of Nilsson, besides,' added the baron, bowing low with his most fascinating air.

Marcelle smiled and blushed with gratified vanity.

'Oh, gentlemen,' she said, 'you are really too good.'

Baron Chevrial raised his little eyes to her fresh, flower-like face with a look of undisciplined admiration, which had in it something inherently repulsive.

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