CHEAP EDITION OF POPULAR AUTHORS.

ROMANCE OF THE GREEN SEAL.

BY CATHARINE A. WARFIELD.
Author of "Household of Bowerie."

WALTON'S No. 2-597

RCULATING LIBRARY,
Nos. 529 and 531 North Eighth Street,
PHILADELPHIA.

By Subscription, 85 00.
Half-yearly, 82.50.
Three months, 81.50. Two books to each Subscriber.
New Books may be kept Ten days; beyond that time 3 cents per day will be charged.

SUBSCRIPTION NEW BOOKS 3 CTS. PER DAY; OLD BOOKS 2 CTS. PER DAY.

WALTON & CO.
PRINTING HOUSE AND FANCY STATIONERY IN GREAT VARIETY.
POCKET BOOKS AND POCKET CUTLERY.
WALTON'S CIRCULATING LIBRARY,
Nos. 529 and 531 North Eighth Street,
PHILADELPHIA.

Yearly Subscription, $5.00. Half-yearly, $2.50.
Three months, $1.50. Two books to each Subscriber.
New Books may be kept Ten days; beyond that time 3 cents per
day will be charged.
DAILY SUBSCRIPTION NEW BOOKS 3 CTS. PER DAY; OLD BOOKS 2 CTS. PER DAY.
WALTON & CO.
COUNTING HOUSE AND FANCY STATIONERY IN GREAT VARIETY.
POCKET BOOKS AND POCKET CUTLERY.
THE ROMANCE

a 597

OF THE

2-1/7-76

GREEN SEAL.

BY MRS. CATHARINE A. WARFIELD.

NEW YORK:
BEADLE AND ADAMS, PUBLISHERS,
98 WILLIAM STREET.
Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1867,
By PEADLE AND COMPANY, in the Clerk's office of the District Court of the United
States for the Southern District of New York.
PART I.

"Yes, madam," she said, setting down the basket of snow-white linen, which she had poised so skillfully on her head, as she advanced, that she scarcely seemed conscious of its presence. "Yes, madam, I can answer you now, though I could not when you first spoke; and so you might have thought me uncivil when I was only overcome by my feelings. I do remember the first time I ever saw my mistress, Madame Aglaé Maurèpas. I was between nine and ten years old then, very small and delicate for my age, though, and I had been playing near the sugar-mills with the other children, and had dropped asleep at last, tired out—for I was not strong like the rest—under a great live-oak tree that grew near by, when I felt a few drops of ice-cold water flutter in my face, and, catching my breath, I awoke suddenly."

"Lazy little thing, get up," said a sweet voice above me. "You came very near getting snake-bitten lying here in the grass. See what a big copperhead your Master Richard has killed, just as it was about to strike you. Now you must never lie down out of doors again—never!"—shaking me slightly, for, though I understood every word she said, I was not more than half aroused, being a languid creature, naturally, except when the fit was on me—I mean the excitement that makes one forget all bodily trouble or ailment. So, all this I heard in a half-drowsy condition, as if I were dreaming. A quicker repetition of the big drops soon brought me to my feet. I staggered—for a moment rubbed my eyes; then, suddenly bracing myself to stand upright, looked full in the face of my master's wife. I had heard my mother and the other women talking about the new mistress—how pretty she was—how young—what a pity it seemed that she had come to that wretched, unquiet home—with much more that I could not understand or distinctly remember; but I had not seen her until now, and I stood dazzled and delighted with her beauty. Madam, she was the prettiest woman my eyes ever rested on. I thought so then, and I think the same way now. She was both fair and dark, like most of our Southern ladies; but every thing else was her own. With a complexion like cream, black-haired, dark-eyed, straight-featured, she had the sweetest, reddest lips eyes ever rested on, and when she smiled her teeth were like pearls. They had a kind of life look I never saw in any other teeth, and were her greatest beauty, many people said. Besides that, she was slim, and tall and graceful, with beautiful feet and hands—the latter like ivory. I noticed these at once, for the drops of water she had been flinging in my face, out of the glass she held, were still dripping from her fingers' tips; and, as I said before, these drops were icy cold, for she was one of those persons who could never touch water, winter or summer, without its being iced. Ice-water was her passion, she used to say, as wine is that of some people.

Ah, madam, you see how that Northern feeling was working in her veins from the very first, and you shall hear how ice and snow, indeed, chilled the very life-blood in her heart before all was over.

"Open your eyes, little tipsy one," she said, laughing; "you feel like a drunken robin. Have you, too, been pecking china-berrys?" Then, with a sudden change of thought, she cried out, in a voice of agony: "Oh, Richard, what if she is snake-bitten!"

The glass fell from her hand and shivered on the ground beside me, and she
had seized me with her trembling hands, and dropped on her knees beside me before I could reassure her.

"I am so glad!" she said, "so relieved!"

Then she kissed me!

Oh! madam, when the blessed angels take hold of me in heaven, to teach me my new life, I may feel as I did then—never before! Even yet that kiss seems at times to thrill upon my cheek, like a sign and a covenant of joy; but, at the time, I stood quite still, and she little dreamed what glued me to the spot, while my head grew light with transport.

She had risen now, and stood smiling down upon me, though her eyes were full of tears. "The child is a little fool," she said, drawing me toward her with a playful gesture. "I believe I have frightened her out of her senses nearly! Yet, look at her, Richard; what a pretty deer-like creature she is! Tell me your name, little one—try and tell me," and she put back the thick tangled ringlets from my eyes, speaking most encouragingly, looking even more so.

"Rena?" I said, timidly, almost gasping with emotion, yet looking her full in the eyes.

"Rena? It is a pretty name," she said, still pondering on my face, "and those are honest eyes!" She mused a moment, then turned away, shaking her head. "What a pity she is so fair, Richard," she said, "so nearly white. I am sorry for the poor—poor little thing!"

"Because she is pretty and happens to be fair of face?" he replied. "Truly, a strange cause of lamentation where a woman is concerned! None but a woman could think so, I am sure." He spoke playfully.

The young gentleman was her cousin, and enough like her to be her own brother.

"Oh, not that—not that, for its own sake alone," she said, hastily; "but I am sure you understand me. Why make me explain? It is not like you to tease, Richard!"

And probably he did understand her, though I did not until long afterward; and yet I remembered distinctly every uncomprehended word that she spoke to me, then and thereafter.

Rena paused thoughtfully.

"You express yourself singularly, Rena," I said, "for a woman of your condition. It must have been this habitual memory of words that assisted you to such accuracy of language, unusual with your people."

"Ah," madam, you will not be surprised at this when I have told you all, and how close I came to her from that hour. Besides, she took pains with me in every way, teaching me secretly what the law forbade her to teach me, and openly whatever was permitted. She was one of those persons that blew sweetness all about them, like a rose or a jessamine flower, and did not keep it shut up like odors in a casket. God made her to perfume His world, I think, like any other blossom; and she felt this, for she made little difference in her consideration of high or low. Wherever her sweet smiles and words could give comfort, they were given, and it is a great mistake to think that a poor slave does not feel courtesy and beautiful ways as much as a great lady or gentleman. When master objected to her open, happy manners, and said she had some strangeness in her that he could not understand, I heard Master Richard telling him that God had made her different from most of His creatures—that she was one of His 'elect,' a born poet—that was what he called her, 'and such beings, Monsieur Maurèpas,' I heard him say, 'have their own ways of seeing and thinking and doing, that can never be corrected. One of these is to love every thing pretty much alike in this outward world of ours, for the sake of its Maker, and hold only a few things close and dear for their own sake; another is the stripping away of all disguises.'"

"Disguises? Who talks of disguises?" my master interrupted, while his face grew black and stormy. "Distinction is the word you aim at, perhaps, Richard Zavier!" and he brought his hand down hard upon the table. "By heaven, when
I see a woman treat her negroes with more civility than some of her husband's chosen associates, I think she wants sense and discrimination, sir?"

Master Richard was silent, for he knew what my master alluded to. It was my mistress' dread of those gamblers he kept so constantly about him—M. Le Maître, in particular, for reasons of her own, that she never told any one, but that I suspected as I grew older.

And true enough it was that she was kind, and polite, and feeling to her slaves, and they adored her for it; so that when she went into their quarters to see the sick, or to carry little presents to the women, those who touched her hand, or the hem of her dress even, were made happy. And they loved me the better because she set above them all. That was a proof, I think, madam, of their devotion to her, and of the way she had of disarming envy and jealousy—things that make people so hard to each other, as a general rule.

"I hope it is not the 'poeta born' who alone are gifted in this way, my good Rena," I said, being myself a prosaic person, and a little nettled for my class; "but that all good Christians love God and His works, and dissuade their brethren from evil."

"Ah, there is the difference, madam, after all! You have shown it to me, in a few words," said the quadroon, thoughtfully. "Christians do what is right from the letter of their teachings, and their love of duty; but she needed no such lesson, and needed no such law. I am sorry to tell you this, madam; but I have put my hand to the plow-handle, as the preachers say, and I will not look back. You shall hear this story, as you desire to do, in all its naked truth.

"Beyond a certain point, duty was no law to her. She could not understand it as pleasant or beautiful, apart from inclination. It chafed her, and she strained and fretted against her chain until it snapped. Then she felt free! For the rest, she was born pitying and true, and those that made her otherwise should bear the blame."

"People have a right to be happy if they can. I remember a copy she set me once, madam. She called it her "golden rule"—"

"Give love no limits; hate no holiday."

"What an extreme sentiment, Rena. I fear your sweet mistress was a little implacable after all—vengeful even."

"Yes, madam, she was; but it was long before she came to that condition of mind. She bore so much first, she forgave so often and so freely, that any one not wholly blind and rockless could have prevented it and made her happy. For she was kind, pitying, tender to the last degree; then, all at once, stone could not be harder or more insensible. That was her nature, madam; God made her so when He poured Spanish blood into her veins. You see, very few knew her as I did, whose youth was spent in her service—hers! now a blessed angel, I must believe, in glory with her Savior."

The woman wiped her still brilliant eyes, and turned away.

After a pause I spoke:

"You loved her very fondly, it seems, Rena?"

"Yes, madam, more than I have done my nearest of kin."

"Strange—strange! Yet, you were her slave! How can this be accounted for? You are now a free woman, and know the vast difference of situations. What made the hand so dear to you that held you in bondage?"

I spoke warmly—indignantly almost, for I resented as an injury to human nature this spaniel-like affection in one of my kind; but I forgot at the time, or did not fairly recognize, as I since have done, the difference of races.

"You Northern ladies can never know," said Rena, solemnly, "the strong bond of affection that draws together good slave, good master. The evil of both classes hate each other, as do all evil persons, wherever found; but this tie, that can not be broken in most cases except by death, is like marriage—sometimes most dear, at others hard to bear."

I did not recognize the force of the comparison, yet suffered it to pass unchallenged, hoping that she might there after proceed with less digression. I
was disappointed. It was now her turn to interrogate.

"And now, let me ask you, madam, before I go farther in this story—which I have never before told except in broken snatches—why it is you show so deep an interest in the fate of my poor mistress, and whether it was to hear of her that you sought me out, through this wide city, to be your laundress, when you could have procured others, near at home, quite as skillful?"

"Your first question I will answer, Rena, before we part; your second at once. It was for this I sought you; and now that I have obtained the promise of this history, let me question you in turn: Why is it that you—a woman so superior to your class in attainments—still follow one of their humblest occupations? You who might obtain confidential employment, or instruct others of your blood, for a livelihood?"

"There are laws and limits, lady, in the South for all people of color," she said, timidly. "I should not dare to teach; but I have a pleasant house, and young clerks for boarders who pay well, and women to help me about my cookery and laundry work—the work I love the best, because I was taught early by my mother to wash fine linen, and my mistress would wear no garment touched by any other hands than hers or mine. Fine spider-web linen she wore, to be sure, with not half the weight in it of yours and others I have washed for—linen-cambric tunics and such like."

I smiled at the curious word so delicately applied: "Your mistress was a Sybarite," I said, smiling.

"Yes, I heard Master Richard call her so. No! it was a Sybil he called her! What is a Sybarite, madam?" she asked, with a sudden shadow of suspicion stealing over her fine countenance.

"Only a person, Rena, who wants everything about him or her perfectly luxuriant. There was one of old times who could not sleep on a bed of roses because one leaf was crumpled. Your mistress was particular in the extreme it seems."

"Yes, in some matters—not in all. She always slept hard, madam; ate simply, touched no wines, cared little for jewels; her bath, her flowers, her fine fragrant linen, her books, her time, were what she wanted and would have. Then she burned a great many wax candles, it is true—yes, she was wasteful in this respect—this only," and she shook her head in a deprecating way.

"I heard Master Richard tell her she reminded him of the cobbler of Brussa, when he saw her with so many lights in her chamber. Did you ever hear of him, madam? The cobbler of Brussa, I mean."

Remembering the old tale of Eastern origin, I laughed and nodded. "When will she get into the heart of the mystery?" I thought.

"A strange spiritual creature, was this same fair mistress of yours, Rena?" I suggested. "Go on. All that you tell me of her interests me more and more. What was her story, Rena?"

"Ah, madam, you will have to let me tell it in my own way, if you care to hear it to the end. I see that you are impatient, but I can not help that. Justice must be done to all, and before you know what my mistress did and how she suffered, you must know what she was, and what others around her were; then you will be prepared to judge correctly."

"This is what painters call putting in a background, Rena, to relieve the figures against. You are right; spare no details. I would know every thing. Take your own time, too," and I leaned back, expectantly, in my chair, resting my cheek on my hand, and fixing my eyes earnestly on the quadroon, who calmly proceeded:

I have told you that Master Richard said she was a "born poet," and not responsible, like other people. This made her very independent, I suppose; for, in spite of continual unkindness on my master's part, and the many crosses he threw in her path, she had her own way of being happy and making others so. She used to tell me that she had an outward world, and an inward
world, apart from the rest. Not even Master Richard could enter these. She said only one ever crossed its boundaries, she told me afterwards, and he came to destroy and to desolate. She called it the "world of fancy!"

The woman gazed at me so seriously that I felt she had lent a material meaning to the metaphor, or, at least, a respect bordering on fanaticism. I was touched by the simplicity of her faith and her wrapt fidelity.

"A beautiful, but dangerous kingdom," I was tempted to reply.

"And there she was a crowned queen, madam! I have heard her say so to Master Richard; but that was only her pretty way of talking, I know, for I never saw her wear any thing of the kind on her head, nor any scepter either, in her hand—a scepter which she promised him to put forth some day, and so touch men's hearts to do deeds of good and glory. But she never did," shaking her head sadly.

"Did she write, Rena—I mean compose poems, or stories, or publish them? I think I have heard so."

"Oh! yes, madam; she wrote a great deal, and took great comfort in her pen. These writings she published in different papers, with Master Richard's assistance, and signed her name 'Valence' to all of them. This was her middle name, and everybody in 'Belle-Garde' parish took pride in these beautiful pieces, which were praised far and near. For all that, her real name, as the writer, never got out to the world, nor beyond the immediate neighbors. She was called Aglaë by her family and friends, and by strangers, of course, Madame Aglaë Maurèpas."

I saw at once what scepter she had alluded to in her girlish gaiety of vanity, but thought it useless to enlighten Rena; so I only replied, amused by her little pomposity.

"Quite a grand name, Rena!"

"Ah! madam, I never thought so," she rejoined; "that Maurèpas had always an evil sound to me. Master Richard said it meant a 'cruel feast,' in the beginning; but perhaps he was jesting. Still, it sounded ill to me. And cruel feasting enough there was, indeed, in that house of Maurèpas! One would have thought Satan and all his imps had been let loose in that great basement-hall—when Monsieur Le Maitre and his cronies came up to do a night's gambling with my master."

"And it was from wretches like these, your mistress shrank! No wonder, poor child," I said, musingly; "but, tell me, Rena, had your profligate master no love for his young and tender wife?"

"More than she ever knew, madam; more than he knew himself, for people don't always understand rightly, it seems to me, what is in their own hearts. She was his pride; yet there never passed a day when he was at home that he did not try to cross or sting her, in some way, or throw her off her guard so as to gain a mean advantage over her; and when he was gone, he set his spies to watch every motion. But this she never knew; and it is something to say, that even they could find nothing against her, watch as they might. Old Pierre, the gardener, and his wife and daughters, were the only people on the plantation base enough for this office, and they had Indian blood in them, we all knew."

"What made you fancy that your master had any affection for one he mistreated so, Rena? What were the signs and tokens?"

"His eyes followed her, madam, wherever she moved. He would lie smoking on the portico, and watch her with a more softened look on his face than I ever saw come to it at any other time, as she trained the vines on the lattice work, or chirped to her caged birds, or played with her fawn, over the balustrades, holding cake and bread so as to make it rear up and eat from her hand; then laughing as merrily as a child. You see it was in her to enjoy every thing. It is not many persons that little things please so greatly, as they did her. Besides, she was always well—and scarcely knew what pain was. Master Richard said she put him in mind of a cup running over with sparkling wine, there was so much life
in her. And my master admired all
this, though he never said so. She was
called, too, the prettiest woman in the
parish, and he was proud of her sitting
at the head of his table when his diners
came, so gay, so gracious, yet so care-
less of every one, for there was not a
man among them that could ever touch
her fancy, try as they might; and she
loved to get away from them into the
quiet of her own chamber, just as soon
as possible after the stately meal was over."

"Rena," she said to me, one night (I
remember it well—it was after a grand
dinner party, and the noise of the
gentlemen came now and then in bursts
through the open window), "Rena, draw
down the blinds, close the curtains,
light the bougies—that was what she
called her wax candles—take away all
this—her fine clothes, she meant—and
bring me a linen wrapper. There,
little one, sit at my feet, and pass
your soft hands across them; they are
weary! Now for Hyperion," and she
took up the book she had left, half read,
on her table, and pored over it silently
for some time. Then she laid it quietly
down again, and folded her hands, with
a soft, pleased expression.

"I am so happy to-night, Rena—so
blessed! Do you know, I care for
nothing earthly outside of this room?
is not this selfish? And yet, there is
enough here to fill my soul with joy and
thankfulness to God."

"Nothing besides?" I thought pro-
er to say. "Oh, mistress, think of
your own dear mother!"

Her head drooped a little; and she
murmured: "She is well off with her
son and her good daughter-in-law, and
in her comfortable home—for which she
bartered me. Was not Joseph happy
in Egypt without his brethren, Rena—
his brethren, who sold him? Yet, he
never ceased to regard them kindly.
I feel like Joseph—alone!"

"And Master Richard," I whispered,
"dear mistress? Don't you love master
Richard?

"Oh, certainly, Rena. Why, what
possesses you to ask such questions? Of
course I love Richard; but I am very
well without him. I have these spells
of unutterable blessedness. I can't help
it! I hope it is not wrong. It is con-
stitutional, I suppose, with me, and I
believe I could be contented on a desert
island, if I were suffered to be free and
at peace."

"Without me, mistress?" I asked,
while tears of vexation stood in my
childish eyes, and I clasped her feet
spasmodically.

"Little goose, what jealous affection
you manifest! What a passionate nature
it is," she went on to say, as she heard
me sobbing, and felt me clinging closely
to her knees, while she patted my head
tenderly; then, in a changed voice, she
added: "But, I do love you, Rena, better
than aught else in the world, I am afraid
—quite well enough for my happiness
and yours. It is very dreadful to love
any frail, perishable creature as you
love me. Don't indulge such fond-
ness, child—don't, if you hope for peace."

Then she murmured: "I thank thee,
oh, God! that my heart is suffered to
be at rest—if, indeed, I possess one at
all. Of this I doubt sometimes."

Just then we heard a tap at the door,
and Master Richard came in, glad to
escape from the "orgies" below, as he
called them; and they were soon deep
in "Hyperion," and in Tennyson—"a
great English poet," they called him.

"Locksley Hall," was the poem he
read that night, I remember, and it kept
ringing in my ears, like a grand organ I
once heard in New Orleans, for days
and nights afterward.

Let me tell you here, madam, that
I slept in a little bed in my mistress'
dressing-room, that she heard my prayers
night and morning, and some lessons
through the day; taught me to sew, to
embroider, exacted from me implicit
obedience, yet never struck me nor
scolded me in her life. Yet I feared
her. I feared something that was in her,
stronger than the power to whip and
scold—a spirit that looked out, some-
times, from her great growing eyes,
terrible, incomprehensible to me—a
silent fiery soul, it seemed, striving to
put aside its bonds of flesh—just about to
soar away. I could compare that look to nothing else.

The very recollection of this peculiar phase of expression seemed to affect the quadroon. She was silent for some minutes.

Later, she said, softly, later, I knew the meaning of that look; but at first it was sealed from me. Oh, sweetest mistress, who else on earth ever loved and suffered like you?

She leaned a moment on her hand—as if lost in meditation. Her eyes were clouded with tears.

“Therewas a latent fierceness, after all, in her character, Rena,” I said; “what brought it out at last? So far, you have shown me nothing that was not sweet and tender in her nature. Some great change must have occurred.”

She smiled bitterly; “Impatient again, madam! That was her fault. I thought you Northerners had more ice and snow in your veins than we poor Southerners. But it is not given to you to know, in the nature of things, how it was that my mistress was both fiery and soft-hearted—both tender and merciless. This mixture belongs to our country alone, men say—but most of all to that Spanish blood which my mistress inherited from her father, Francis Zavier, and which mixes as poorly in American veins as oil with water. Certainly, her father’s nature was uppermost in her. Madame Zavier was a tame woman, and such are called ‘enduring,’ but my master would have crushed her into misery and obstinacy directly, calm as she seemed, while my mistress slipped from between his fingers like a spirit. She was too fine for his clumsy blows. He might as well have tried to grapple with flame, or to catch a will-o’-the-wisp, as to conquer her through terror. She was not afraid of him either, and he knew it. She was not afraid of any one she did not love, and for him she had no affection, else she, too, like his poor first wife, might have been a coward before him.”

Was it not strange, madam, that the very thing he admired in her—this fine and fearless spirit that gave her leave to be happy, even in a tyrant’s presence—he tried constantly to crush out of her? I will give you but one instance of the way she opposed him when her feelings were excited, and the way in which she bore his cruelty afterward.

Once, when my mother was to have been whipped for some slight offense against my master, and, in the absence of the overseer, by his own hand (the offense was one of oversight—not of rebellion), my mistress stood resolutely before her, and the first blow of the horsewhip he used fell on her own white shoulders—tearing the flesh away in a ghastly wound.

My master had not supposed that she would stand her ground between them when he struck at my mother. To do him justice, he was greatly shocked, and flung the riding-whip from him, muttering great oaths, then striding off without a word of regret. The proof that he felt the matter being only this—that he never struck my mother again while she lived, and was sullenly depressed for days after. He never sought to know how deeply he had wounded the tender flesh of his wife. I was the only one who saw that wound, and she charged me not to speak of it, even to my mother. “It is disgraceful, you see, Rena,” she said, half laughing, “for a lady to be whipped like a slave, and must be kept secret from all the world. You understand this, I know.”

“But was she not indignant at her husband’s barbarity—cold and resentful to him? I am sure I should have been.”

“Oh, not at all. She knew the blow was not intended for her, and she saw that he suffered. She rejoiced in the idea that she had done good to more than one, first by awakening in his breast a spirit akin to remorse, perhaps new resolutions, merciful in themselves and the parents of better thoughts; secondly, in saving my feeble mother from undeserved punishment.”

“Just think, Rena,” she said to me, as I was dressing the wound with salve as she instructed me to do, “how twenty such stripes as these would have hurt that poor, sickly woman, if one pays me so, who am comparatively strong and
healthy. Besides, this teaches me how to feel for others and to suffer with them. It is good for me, and our Savior himself was scourged."

She said this, I knew, to strengthen herself to bear the pain; but I could only reply with sobs and tears, while she shivered with agony.

"Hush, hush, unreasonable child," she said; "you have not a particle of courage, I fear, and you quite unnerve me by your conduct. Be still, Rena, and never allude to what you see to-day, nor to the wound—that is, if you love your mistress."

The injunction was obeyed; I stifled my sobs, and never before breathed a word of this dreadful stripe to human ears; yet, when my hands straightened her for the coffin, it was still there, purple, and sore, perhaps, through all her life—at least I often suspected this, when I felt her wince from my fingers as I fastened her dresses and stays. But, she never complained, and I knew her too well to ask her any questions about it. She was one of those persons who put aside a wrong once and forever when she forgave it. There were slighter blows than this that she resented more. But, you shall hear.

"Was your master really improved by this beautiful forbearance on her part?" I asked. "I trust he was, for the honor of human nature. Was he more kind to her thereafter?"

"No, madam, I can not say he was. He was one of those people that needed a victim and enjoyed one, as a cat does torturing a mouse. It was his nature—a fierce appetite. He could not help it, I suppose. Yet, in the bottom of his heart he loved her—if such a feeling came between them at all, a thousand times better than she loved him."

"Ay, that was the worst part of the story, Rena. Had she but loved him, all might have been well," I exclaimed, with an irrepressible groan. She started as she saw me leaning back in my chair, quite faint and pale.

"You have some great interest in this tale, lady," she said. "You can not conceal it. What can you know of that part of the story, which I have not told you yet?"

"I know nothing perfectly, and that is the reason I seek to know the whole. My reasons you shall have hereafter. My happiness, perhaps, or that of others near to me is staked on the truth of your narration. Tell me nothing else, as you hope for life in heaven."

She raised her hand with great solemnity. "I swear to tell you the truth, if I tell you any thing," she said, "but this rests with you alone. Would it not be better, for your peace of mind, to hear no more? Consider, lady, before you lift the veil: you may find a corpse beneath it, where you hope for life."

I saw what she suspected, from my momentary vehemence, and I resolved to disarm her, if possible, by my manner thenceforth, of suspicions that might only frustrate my earnest desire to hear the story she alone could give me faithfully, in all its delicate and mysterious details.

"I will hear it," I said, calmly. "As a connection by marriage with one of the parties interested, I naturally feel a desire to know the truth with regard to his complicity in the affair.

"Are you sure no blood of yours flowed in his veins, lady?"

"Not a drop, I assure you, Rena."

My careless manner and the openness of my gaze partly reassured her.

"Is that your husband's picture?" she asked, abruptly, pointing to the cabinet-sized portrait of a dark, handsome man upon the wall. "As often as I have been here I have never seen him."

"Yes, that is his picture, Rena. My husband is absent just now, in Cuba. When he comes again you shall judge for yourself if this likeness be correct."

She mused awhile, looked at me earnestly from time to time, finally seemed quite satisfied that she had been mistaken in her first conjecture, then resumed the thread of her desultory narrative—it might be called—her very strange, analytic, and didactic discourse, which, so far, revealed nothing of all I most desired to know, yet which deeply interested me from its earnestness.

"We were speaking of my master,
she said. "He was a French creole, madam, as you might know from his name, and there is a great deal of the tiger in that blood, at the best, they say; but his, I have heard tell, was a straight stream from the veins of the French revolutionists. He had a long light lock of hair, of a kind of faded gold-color, that he used to bring out sometimes, and that he said his father had torn from the head of the Princess Lamballe, and left to him as a priceless treasure! Did you ever hear of her, madam, or was there, truly, such a person?"

I shuddered as I recalled the frightful incident of her death at the hands of an infuriated mob, and confirmed her existence by a few faltering words, then asked:

"How did your mistress bear the exhibition of this trophy?" From trilles like these I thought to derive gradually a true knowledge of her character, apart from prejudice.

"Bear it? She would hide her face and shriek and quiver with agony, as though a poisonous snake had been in the room. He never did anything to her at first that affected her more deeply than this, and he took care not to repeat this torture too often, for fear of losing its effect, I suppose," she said, bitterly.

"I could give him credit for no nobler motive."

"He was a bad man, Rena, a very fiend. Was it the habit of your mistress to retaliate on him, with words, or how did she defend herself from his ill usage?"

"With looks, chiefly."

"Looks, Rena? I did not think any woman's eyes could cope with such a monster."

"She had such strange light in hers—like sheet-lightning in a thunder-cloud. Madam, if you had ever met a panther-cat at twilight, with its great glowing, steady, dilating eyes, shining like balls of fire, you might know how hers looked, sometimes, when my master would treat too sorely on her feelings. And he shrunk from those looks—he quailed under them, as almost any man would have done. There was great power in her, somehow—gay and delicate, and careless as she seemed to be—Master Richard called it 'magnetic power.' I never understood him exactly."

"Did she ever give him one of her terrible looks?" I asked.

"Not more than once or twice in her life, that I know of, and they well-nigh killed him."

"There seems to have been a strong attachment between these two young people, Rena. Was your master never jealous of Richard Zavier?"

"Jealous! oh no, madam, not in the true sense of the word. His jealousy of Master Richard was only to vent his rage! They had been bred up like brother and sister, and were own cousins, and, outside of her chamber, Master Richard was the only true comfort my mistress ever had. My master had great respect for him at the bottom of his heart—for his character, so spotless and Christian-like was it; and for his fine intelligence and manners, and for his blood, which he well knew was better than his own, though Master Richard was then, as far as people knew, a poor struggling physician, living in the little town of Chaireforte, near by, and just managing to make both ends meet, by editing a small newspaper, and keeping the post-office, and selling drugs, as well as practising his profession. Any thing for a decent livelihood, he would say. But he always kept up appearances, as a true gentlemen will ever strive to do. He had his horse, and his own servant (my husband afterward, madam, an excellent Christian colored man, like, and yet now unlike, his master), and Master Richard was always well dressed—carefully so when he came to Maurepas, which was regularly once a week, for a night and day, and this was the happiest time of her life to my poor mistress."

You should have seen them, madam, sketching and writing and strolling together; you should have heard his sweet voice reading the Scriptures to the slaves on Sunday, and explaining it as he went. Even my master could see no harm in such an intercourse.

Yet he often treated Master Richard
very coldly, as, indeed, he did all visitors, except those who came to carouse with him, or those who, like himself, had lands, gold, and negroes to boast about; and, I think, if he had dared to do it, he would have cut his wife off even from this pure and sweet society, as he had done from all others. For, madam, my mistress was a prisoner on her own plantation, never allowed to visit anywhere; and this was whispered around, and in spite of her wealth and beauty, people pitied her as much as they disliked Maurêpas.

Yet, I am telling you about the happy time of her life, just now—happy, in spite of her mean, tantalizing husband, her solitude—greater even in cities than elsewhere, when he took her to New Orleans or Mobile, and guarded her all the time, scarcely leaving her alone, even with me, for more than a few moments each day; happy, in spite of my master’s quarrels with her mother, which banished Madame Xavier from his house forever; in spite of the absence of all religion, except what she built up for herself, on the foundation of Master Richard’s teaching, for no expounder of God’s word was ever permitted to set foot at Maurêpas.

In spite of all these drawbacks, she was happy, madam, at the time of which I am telling you; happy in herself; happy, it seemed to me, like a bee or a butterfly!

“A selfish sort of happiness, at best, Rena.”

“God might have thought so, madam, and so given her the trials I have yet to tell. But, her wrestle in the tent ended not at dawn. Well, it is all over now; but I can not blame her, study as I may! I am one of those who believe that people have a right to try to be happy in their own way, so that they hurt no one but themselves in the failure.”

She spoke almost defiantly.

“Rena,” I replied, “duty and principle are above all else, and it is not possible for harm to stop with one alone, any more than for a ripple made by the smallest pebble to cease before it reaches the shore. Such is the philosophy of life—such its stern reality.”

Rena made no reply, but stopped gloomily to take up the basket she had emptied, and placing and poising it again on her head, moved toward the door.

“You are going Rena?”

“Yes, madam; but I will return. I have no heart to tell you the story of the ‘Green Seal’ to-day. But, before you go to your own North country again, you shall hear all, if you have a mind to listen patiently, for I have but a slow way of getting along when I talk of her—of my mistress, I mean.”

“Stay, Rena! I have a proposition to make you. Why will you not go North with us, where this stigma of color exists not—where you would be estimated as you deserve to be—where you could shake off, forever, the old brand of slavery, and live a truer life than you can ever do here?”

She smiled half disdainfully, hesitated, colored, but her natural courtesy held in check, I think, the reply she was about to make. Then she said, in soft accents:

“Lady, you mean well, I know; but I should die in one year in your country. What would I be away from sunshine and flowers, and my own fruits, and my own people? The snow, and the cold, quiet ways folks have there, would never suit me; nor the foods they eat, nor the manner of their living. Then, to have to be thrown with low Dutch and Irish, and such white trash, would be dreadful to me, dear lady. Here, the planters protect us from being troubled by such rabble, and the free quadroons are very happy together—a race apart. No, I must live and die in the South; it is my country, and Louisiana is the garden-spot of the world!”

She had said much of this as she walked slowly away from me. Now turning at the door, she made me a low salaam, gave me a pleasant smile, and vanished into the corridor. A few moments later I saw her stately form passing in the street below my window, erect, graceful, self-poised, with
her basket on her head, as an empress crowned!

But I knew she would return. It was with her now a necessity to tell that tale, as great as the "Ancient Mariner's"—a necessity even greater, perhaps, than was mine to hear it.

PART II.

AGAIN Rena came. It was a morning in June, redolent with balm and fragrance, such a day as we feel nowhere, I believe, beyond the northern limits of Louisiana. But, the time had come for me to leave behind me that delicious yet dangerous clime, and the last washing of snowy linen had been brought home preparatory to my departure. The quadroon had volunteered to assist me to pack my trunks, and I had obtained the promise of her long-delayed story before we should commence the business of the day, or days, as it might be.

"Sit down, Rena, in that low chair," I said. "Rest, for you seem weary. Take this for refreshment," and I poured her a glass of iced lemonade from the crystal pitcher on the slab. "And now, Rena, time presses. Having prepared your background, hasten to paint in your figures."

She understood me, evidently, for, setting down her empty glass, she began suddenly, and with more directness than I could have expected, to relate her "Romance of the Green Seal."

Let me apologize here for many deviations as to mere expressions from Rena's mode of narrative—the thread of which, however, is strictly observed, and the manner, also, as far as memory serves me, and a different mold of mind would admit, after the lapse of months, for it was not until long after I returned to my northern home, that I committed to writing the second portion of this story of real life, so deeply, painfully engrossing to my feelings.

You know already, dear lady, that my mistress was Madam Aglaé Mauritpas—Mlle. Zavier before her marriage.

My master was nearly twenty years older than she, but was still considered a very handsome man, tall, commanding-looking, with black eyes, hair, and beard, an aquiline nose, fine teeth, smooth, though sallow skin, and a drey, fashionable air. My mistress was seventeen when he first saw her at the opera, and vowed that she should be his wife. The thing seemed preposterous then. He had been a cruel husband to his first wife—a plain, but excellent woman, whom he had married for her money. This was well known to her friends, and many persons believed his bad treatment to have been the principal cause of her death. It is true, he was rich and childless; but, on the other hand, Mr. Francis Zavier was a famous merchant in those days, having his principal house in Havana, though he made New Orleans his home, as it was his favorite place of business. His daughter was there a reigning belle, besides being very beautiful and gifted, "a genius" was what they called her.

Providence placed my poor mistress in his hands at last. In the great crisis of that year of thirty-seven, Mr. Francis Zavier was involved, and, after struggling a few months against his troubles, died of a broken heart, a bankrupt, leaving a widow and four children, the eldest of whom was Mademoiselle Aglaé, the others, boys from eight to sixteen years old, unable, at that time, to make their own support.

It chanced that my master held a claim against Mr. Zavier's estate, indorsed by his wife, whose small private property, a plantation, was thus placed wholly at his mercy.

He acted with great seeming generosity on this occasion, and the end was an understanding between him and Madame Zavier, that in return for her daughter's hand, she was to have his relinquishment. It was a perfect bargain and sale; yet I believe the mother thought she was doing the best thing possible for her child as well as herself, in encouraging, if not compelling, this marriage. Miss Aglaé had no other attachment. She was averse, at first, but at last persuaded herself that she would
learn to love Monsieur Maurêpas when she got used to his ways and looks. And so, when eighteen years old, she married him—a man of upward of seventy-and-thirty at the time, and wholly uncongenial to her in every way.

"Ah, madam, that is the secret of married happiness after all—suitability," said Rena, solemnly, "and nothing can make up for this want. They did not suit each other," she continued, in the same philosophic vein, "but, surely, this was no fault of hers, for, who was there my master would have suited with his cruel, morose temper, his hardness, his profligacy, his cowardice?"

She ground the last word between her short, white teeth, as if it had been some obnoxious matter which she was trying to reduce to powder, and her eyes fairly flashed fire.

"You hated your master, Rena?"

"No madam, no; I never hated him, except for her sake. Whatever he did to me and mine has been freely forgiven, long ago, as you shall hear when the end comes. I am not given by nature to hating any one."

"Yet persons of your blood are said to be revengeful. What was your own history, Rena? How came you in his hands? Was he—"

I hesitated, but she understood me instantly.

"No, madam, he was no kin of mine. My father was a ship captain, a Swede, a brave, bold man, handsome, (I have his picture that shows for itself,) good-tempered, affectionate. He was lost at sea when I was three years old, so that my mother and myself had to be sold for the benefit of his creditors. He had left us free in his will, but this, owing to his involvements, could not be carried into effect, and Monsieur Maurêpas bought us together on the block. He made my mother his housekeeper at first, but grew dissatisfied with her, for his own reasons, and turned her out of his house, after beating her severely, with orders to set foot there no more. Then he took in Phoebé Reviere, who suited him better. After this, my mother did the plantation sewing, being too delicate to work out.

She had never done any thing harder than cleaning a house, or getting up fine linen, or a meal, in her life, and that for her own benefit, and had enjoyed every comfort.

"At first she was very miserable, but afterward married Frederick Tanque, the foreman of the place, and was comparatively happy again. He was kind to her, and their cabin was the best kept, and most spacious on the plantation. They had fig-trees, peaches, and plantains in plenty, in their inclosure, and fowls, and pigs, so that they were well supplied with food; and, as they had no children, lived without much exertion."

My mother worshiped the new mistress. She had never known the first Madam Maurêpas, whose plain, white tombstone was placed in the grove near the sugar-mill—a sort of play-place for the children—and whose ghost was said to haunt the long lemon-tree walk that led to the mansion. My mother saw it herself, and though she had never seen the first mistress, she described her to a hair afterward, even to a little halt in her walk, and the way she had of waving her hands as she went, and her strange, blue eyes, so dim and cold, and pale golden hair, faded and straight. It makes my blood creep but to think of it.

She shuddered visibly.

"You believed this, Rena?" She looked at me with grave surprise; then, dropping her eyes, said, with some asperity, "Certainly, madam. My mother was a truthful person, and a religious woman—a pattern for the whole plantation."

I felt rebuked, more by her manner than her words. "But, it was not my mother's story I came here to tell you," she continued, with a sad smile; "that would interest you, and such as you, but little; the story of a slave—what does it amount to?" Again she mused.

I thought of Keats' epitaph as an apt illustration, but made no further remark. I wished to throw no possible hinderances in her way, and yet she was mistaken in her assertion. "The story of a slave," accurate, unbiased, natural, and the workings of a slave's own mind, under all circumstances, would be one of the most interesting narratives the world
has yet received. Perhaps we might find in it the keystone of compensation, and receive thereby lessons yet undreamed "in our philosophy."

I remember the day as well as though it was yesterday, when Master Richard knocked at my mistress' chamber-door, and handed her a letter fastened with a green seal, continued Rena. It was a Saturday afternoon in September, just four years to the very day after her marriage. Already she was alone in her bed-room, as she ever after remained, for master preferred his separate apartments in the wing—where he could go and come just as he chose to do, and drink deep at night if it suited him. The arrangement pleased her more than he liked to see. She felt so secure, so happy in the sole possession of her room, or rooms, rather, for she had a spacious dressing-room, and her bed stood in a windowed alcove, so that when the curtains were dropped, her chamber looked like a beautiful parlor. She kept her books, her secretary, and her harp there. On the last she played very finely, having been well taught this accomplishment at her convent. I mention all this to show you that it was not a breach of propriety for Master Richard to come to her sleeping apartments, as he always did—a fashion more prevalent in the South, I suppose, than with you Northern people, who build so many stories to your houses, as I hear. The mansion of "Maurépaes" was all on one floor, and every room opened by long windows on galleries, so none were very private. The drawing-room was never used except for company, nor the state dining-room. Two of the chambers were reserved for guests. The breakfast-room was only opened at meals, and in the two opposite wings lived my master and mistress. So you may see, dear lady, what sort of married felicity was theirs!

But, let me go back to that first letter, with the seal of her fate upon it—the seal that seemed, from the very beginning, to work with her like witchcraft. Madam, do you believe there is such a thing?

She asked the question so solemnly, so abruptly, that it startled me.

"Magnetism is very like it, Rena, in its effects," I answered, gravely, "and I certainly believe in that; but the sources are widely different."

"Madam, believe me or not, as you will, I am quite sure in my own mind that the 'green seal,' even more than the words written, was what bewitched my mistress, with the evil thing figured upon it that tempted Eve, and the magic writing beneath; but you must judge for yourself of this, from what I shall tell you."

My mistress turned the letter over very carefully in her hand after she received it, and finally, before she broke the seal, read the superscription aloud:

"To 'Valérie,' care of the post-master at Claireforde, Belle-garde Parish," and postmarked "Boston."

"What can it possibly be?" she asked.

"Some Yankee scheme to get up a book of poems for nothing by contributions, for a benevolent purpose, of course," said Master Richard, smiling, with a sort of scorn.

"I feel it is not this, Richard," she said, as she broke it open, then grew silent in the perusal.

Her face flushed all over, dimpled, sparkled, as she read, to the very end, then turning, she handed it to her cousin.

"Read it yourself, Richard; read it aloud! It is the most beautiful letter I ever received in my life, even at the time when I received many such—the most poetic; and see what a noble handwriting forms the medium of all these lovely thoughts. Oh, who could have written it to me, to me, Richard," clasping her hands, and speaking as though she were one of the despised of the earth.

Master Richard took the letter, a little coldly, I thought; then read it aloud, as she had desired him to do. The music of his voice suited the words so well that my car was filled with delight, although I caught little of their meaning. I dropped my sewing, and, putting back my hair, listened with eager attention.

My mistress clasped her hands and laughed outright—her merry, bird-like laugh!

"See, Richard, how Rena is transfixed.
There must be strange magic in these mere 'words—words'—as Hamlet called such—to charm even the child that can not understand them!"

"Convincing proof, dear coz, on this occasion, that the sound is better than the sense. The language is all very fine, but"

"But me no buts, Master Richard!" she interrupted gayly, "and give me back my much-abused letter." (extending her hand at the same moment to receive it, then placing it in her waistband, next her heart). "There it shall lie, you envious, souring philosopher, until it is worn to shreds; and for your punishment, I shall not call you into consultation, fair sir, when I receive another."

"Another, Aglaë? Why, with all your womanly vanity—gratified by this fulsome piece of flattery, no doubt—you surely do not mean to answer this letter! Nay, fortunately, you can not," he added, with a look of satisfaction at the sudden reflection—"for it is anonymous. I am glad of that, for your own sake."

She made him a profound courtesy. "Wise oracle," she said, "you need new spectacles! There was just one little scrap, perhaps, at the bottom of that letter, you did not notice, not having eyes like mine, that promised me another intellectual treat before the moon should wane, and after that, perhaps other revelations may come to facilitate correspondence. What say you to this programme of mine, Great Solomon?"

"I appeal from Valérie tipsy (with praise) to Valérie sobered by reflection, that is all," said Master Richard, archly, yet not without a change of color, and an uncertain expression of the eye that always came to him when he was troubled in any way. "And now, cousin, I must see about my horse."

"My society is not stable enough for you, Cousin Zavier, it appears," she said, trying to appear unconcerned, yet really much annoyed. "See what a 'pundit' I am becoming under this new phase of inspiration!"

He was gone, without another word, or without noticing her effort to amuse him, and she sat quite silently for a time, looking upon the floor. When she raised her eyes, I was standing before her.

"What have I done to him, petite, to enrage him so? And what in the world do you stand there for, making great eyes at me, as if I had committed some heinous crime? Go directly, Renald, and put fresh rose-leaves in my drawers. Why have you neglected this? Yet, stay; it is too late now; to-morrow will do as well. Don't leave me just now."

A pause.

"After all, is it not worse than a sin to be so pragmatic?" she asked, turning away.

"I don't know, mistress," I said, "what it is to be pragmatic."

She laughed heartily at my difficulty in pronouncing the word, which I repeated again and again after her. "Little goose. As if I were talking to you. What a literalist you are, to be sure! Can not one think aloud, sometimes, in one's own chamber, without an eternal echo?"

I hung my head rebuked. "Come now," she continued, as if to revive me, "can you tell me what it is to be pragmatic—what the long, ugly, consequential word means, Renald?"

"I will look in the dictionary, mistress, if you'll tell me how it is spelled," I said.

She had taught me to do this readily, and it gave me great delight. "Never mind the dictionary this time, child! You will not find all the meanings there, perhaps—all my meanings. To be pragmatic is to be dry and cross and hateful—to preach, and counsel, and snarl, and pretend to pray sometimes, and to spoil every one's pleasures, if possible—to be a wet blanket, in short—but you don't know otherwise than literally what that means, I suppose—in other words, to lecture, like your Master Richard. So you understand now, Renald?"

"Oh, mistress," I said, clasping my hands in a sort of pious horror of her behavior that I could not conceal; "how can you speak so of your own dear cousin Richard, who is so good to you and me—who never—" I stopped abruptly, frightened when I saw how red she grew, then pale again, in a moment. Then she rose, standing quite still, and looking
off, as if to hide her tears from me; but I knew they had started, from the tone of her voice when she spoke again.

"You are right, Rena; he is as nearly perfect as man ever gets to be, and I am not worthy to tie the latchet of his shoe."

So speaking, she was gone. I well knew whither, and I was not surprised, a few moments later, to see her walking down the lemon-walk with Master Richard, her hand upon his shoulder, in their old affectionate way, so brotherly and sisterly like; but, by this time, the letter with the green seal on it lay close against her heart. It was there when I undressed her at bed-time. It was there nearly a month later, when Master Richard brought her another.

Again I remember the occasion on which that letter came. She was standing on the portico this time, dressed for company, in her embroidered India muslin, with a little black lace scarf over her shoulders, and a Cape jessamine-flower in her hair and bosom. Ah, madam, she was beautiful in that dress! My master was giving orders to some of the house waiters at the steps, and his back was turned to them both when Master Richard walked up to her with the letter closed with a green seal—as the first had been. He had gone through the hall, after hitching his horse to the post at the back door of the house as he usually did, and it was mere accident that my master did not see him, for there was nothing in his manner that was not quite open, as he gave it into her hand. He was about to make some remark, about the letter itself, probably, when, laying her finger on her lip, she placed it hastily in the folds of her surplus waist; then, walking toward the end of the gallery where I was seated, she signaled to him to follow her.

He did so, and for a time stood beating his boot with his riding-whip, looking down and waiting to hear what she had to say to him, with a perplexed countenance, I thought. She, too, seemed embarrassed.

She was the first to break silence.

"How could you be so imprudent, so careless of my feelings, Richard," I heard her say, "as to hand me my letter publicly? Don't you know I am a prisoner of state?" with a bitter smile, "not permitted to receive letters even from my mother, without previous inspection? Would you deprive me of my only private correspondent? My spirit of fire—my Ariel?"

"Can it be possible, Agilea," he asked indignantly, yet in a suppressed voice, "that his vigilance descends to such injustice? Your mother's letters investigated? Does she know of this? Yet, after all—what difference would it make to him, if she did?" He seemed greatly troubled.

"Yet cousin," he added, after a pause, "none the less do I deem it my duty to be entirely open in this matter, with you and yours; and as I am made, so far, an unwilling medium, I must not be compelled to be a clandestine one."

"Richard, would you kill me?" It was well that my master had gone down toward the lake-shore, by this time, or he certainly must have heard her and noticed her agitation.

"No—no, indeed, Agilea. You know I would give my life to serve you in any honorable manner; but I don't feel that I am doing right in the sight of God and man in bringing anonymous letters to you, even though they contain no more offensive matter than barren compliment."

Her manner changed suddenly.

"It is your duty to deliver them to me, sir, and to none else—your duty as a sworn government officer. I saw a decision of the courts on this point, lately—an accidental coincidence that I am glad to have met with. I demand, henceforth, as my right—my legal right, that none need gainsay—that my letters be delivered into my own hand." She spoke very fast—she was angry, now; her eyes flashed. He smiled at her vehemence.

"When did you grow such a stickler for legal rights, dear coz? Have I not heard you very often rebuke the law as tyrannous, unworthy of a civilized age, behind the times—especially as far as women's rights are concerned?"

"This is an amendment, Richard, and I mean to take advantage of it."

"In order to do so, Agilea, your
cherished secrecy will have to be compromised. Your proceedings against the postmaster of Claireforte, must be public, and in open court. In the mean time, he has matters pretty much in his own hands. So, take your farewell to-day of the unknown knight of the 'Green Seal.' He comes to you no more!

She trembled; she turned pale.

"What do you mean to do, Richard?" she asked, in a piteous tone.

"To turn back the letters," he replied, sternly, "to him who sent them, through the postmaster of Boston, with the assurance that 'Valérie' will in the future receive no such communications; or, to let them drift to the dead-letter office—which would you prefer?"

I never thought my Master Richard cruel until that moment. He must have known how he was harassing her. Yet he looked wholly unconcerned.

She laid her trembling hand upon his arm, and looked full into his face.

"If you were to do either, I should hate you, Richard Zavier," she said, through her clenched teeth, still looking at him.

I saw him shrink and shiver in turn.

"Would this be possible for you, Agile?" he asked, "would it be possible?" He spoke like one in a dream. Her only reply was a short, bitter laugh, and, leaving him abruptly, she advanced to meet her husband, now returning to the steps with a gloomy look. She saw in a moment what was vexing him.

"They will hardly come to-night, Mr. Maurépas, I think," she observed; "it looks so stormy, and the lake seems in such commotion already. One could see it very plainly from the portico—a wide, clear sheet of water, usually calm, but broken into white caps now—surrounded by plantations, many of them quite out of sight, however—indeed, miles away. "I trust they will not come, if that cloud keeps its promise," she continued, "for their own sakes," and she pointed to one in the far west, small, black, ragged, yet dense, and defined as though a piece of broken slate had been suspended from the heavens.

"Your chief hope, after all, is, that I may be disappointed, no doubt. As to your anxiety for their safety, it does not amount to much, I take it," said Mr. Maurépas, sullenly; "but, I tell you, madam, they will come, unless hell hides them to-night; so make ready—and hark ye, Agile, ice the wines this time; don't forget it as you did last week, as if no one needed ice but yourself. Ice enough you have at heart, I should think, to keep you from thirsting for it," he muttered; "but go, have the tables set out at once. We shall play late and commence early. Will you join us, Richard Zavier?"

Elevating his voice in these last words, with a sneer that Master Richard took no notice of, for still he stood like a stone where my mistress had left him, with his arms folded on the balustrade, looking out on space, as if he saw something no one else could see, coming from afar.

Madam, I have thought, sometimes, since then, in looking back over all things that happened between then and now, that perhaps Master Richard had a sorrowful glimpse, at that moment, of what lay before my mistress—"second sight" some people call it. Any how, he never seemed exactly the same happy man afterward—to me, at least, who observed him so closely.

My mistress did not go down to the great dining-hall—seldom used except for such occasions—to superintend matters, as she usually did, on that evening; but, giving her directions clearly and decidedly to the principal waiter, Julius Strong, she shut herself up in her room at once, taking me with her.

"I have something here, Rena," she said, as she pressed her hand to her bosom, "to make amends for all. A rose has sprung up in my wilderness. Let me enjoy it. Now light the myrtle wax taper, petite" (the closed shutters made it too dark to read, though still early), "and hold it close—close to me, while I read my precious letter. See, Rena, there is the envelop, child! you may look at the seal, if you choose, and see what you can make of it," and she flung it to me, over the table by which she sat.

"Oh, mistress," I said, setting down the taper in my excitement, "it is a dreadful green snake, with its tail in its
mouth—a snake, just like that master Richard killed last week, I believe. It makes my blood creep to look at it."

"Foolish little creature! It is the emblem of eternity, nothing more. But, how do you suppose I can read, with the taper a yard off, and with your silly interruptions? Be silent; stand close to me; shade the light with your hand, so as to throw every ray upon the paper, and to keep them from the light outside, and look steadily at me, if you will look; for, Rena," with her sudden smile, "I am entering my precious kingdom now. Behold! I am putting on my crown."

I felt quite awed at these words, and was as still as a mouse, thereafter, watching her beautiful face, as she had hidden me do (though, glancing up, I could see no crown on her head), now covered with smiles, now quivering with emotion; and hearing, with amazement, her broken exclamations of delight and surprise, as she read sheet after sheet of the long, closely-written, sweet-smelling letter, quite to the end.

Then she pressed it repeatedly to her lips, her breast, with her eyes uplifted as though she were mutely thanking heaven for the possession of such a treasure.

"More beautiful, if possible, than the other"—she said, at last; "but, not for you, this time, oh! cruel Richard, is its perusal. Never again shall mortal eyes come between me and my happiness! 'Egeria!' he calls me his 'Egeria'!—implies an answering sign. Who am I, to dare to withhold it from my soul's sovereign?" Then she mused. "Yes, yes, I will be happy, and in my own way. My body is in bonds and must remain so; but, thank God, my soul is free! And what a spirit from afar has taken shelter under its spreading wings at last! What a great, noble intellect—what a soul of fire has vailed itself in these pages! What must the reality be—what, indeed! But, of that, let me never dare to dream!" So she spoke, so she wrote; and, day after day, she would read aloud to me—or rather, to herself—the diary she kept, in which the progress of this "spirits passion," as she called it, was set down, in words of flame.

But now she called to me to fetch her little sandalwood note box; and, taking from it her mother's letters, she placed them elsewhere for safety, and dropped into its satin-lined depths two fresh ones—each in its green-sealed envelope; then locking it, she slipped the key on her watch-chain, and smiled again as she gave me the box. "That is my treasure chest, Rena," she said, gayly. "There, place it in the armoire, and tell no one what it contains, as you value my life, child. And now, while I have a moment of time, speak your poem once again. I did not listen to it this morning, as I should have done; and you must have it perfectly when master Richard comes to-night."

The task she had set me was a little hymn, called "There is nothing true but Heaven," and I declared it to her entire satisfaction. Once a week a lesson of this sort was exacted from me by my young teacher; and often, as I lie awake at night, those childish lessons come back quite clearly to my mind, as if written on the wall; and ever with them returns the light of those dear eyes, now faded forever.

But I am rambling again from my story. Let me tell you what happened that night, as it had something to do with what came afterwards, and roused my mistress greatly, at the time, from all selfish dreams and considerations.

Just as I had finished my recitation, a peal of thunder shook the house; the lightning glared through the closed jalousies; the taper fluttered and died out in the blast, and the storm began in all its equinoctial violence.

My mistress went out presently, either to seek the protection of her husband and master Richard, or to persuade them to come in and close the house against the approaching hurricane, I know not which. She found them together, sitting silently on the portico, watching the foaming lake and gathering blackness with an anxious and gloomy expression on either face. Later they all came in to the breakfast-room, whether she had sent me with orders to Julius the waiter, and the tea-table had been
laid, when they entered, with the beautiful decorated china.

"Could you not have waited a while, Aglæa," asked my master, snappishly, "when you knew there were guests expected?"

"I thought they might be delayed," she answered—"or—or—"—hesitating—"not coming at all, in view of the threatening tempest, and I hoped a cup of coffee, or tea, or chocolate might cheer you both. I am sure you seem to need cheering," she spoke affectionately, looking from one to the other; but neither face relaxed; no one spoke further.

No one ate a mouthful. A cup of coffee was hastily drained by my master; but master Richard and my mistress just tasted theirs. Both were ashen pale, as wilder and wilder rose the tempest without, and the house trembled and groaned—under the great pressure of the driving north wind.

"Did you ice the wines, Julius?" growled my master. "I suppose that has never been thought of, and they will be as hot as the devil, until midnight."

"Yes, sah; mistress sent me to do dat an hour ago."

"Indeed! wonderful to relate! There are times, it seems, when it suits you to remember, madam!"

"There are times and things I am not permitted to forget, Léon," replied my mistress, mournfully.

"You put out the tables, of course, Julius; but have you lit the candles yet?" he questioned.

"No master; I thought I would wait."

"Thought! who told you to think, sirrah?" thundered my master, stamping his foot imperiously. "You know that, wet as they are, or will be, they will plunge right down there for dry garments. Are guests of mine to grope in the darkness, like bats? Go instantly"—and he used an oath, again stamping his foot and shaking his fist angrily, "and light every candle in the saloon. Do you hear me, you villain?"

No one dared to oppose him, and the order was carried out, uselessly as it seemed.

There, in the great arched dining-room, with its pavement of white and black marble, the gaming tables were set out, with all the counter-boxes on them; the wines in the beauston were in ice; the cigars piled on silver salvers, with matches at hand; the candles lit—all was complete, except the expected guests, who came not; until the ice had melted from the wines that no lips of theirs might ever drain, and the candles had flared out almost to the socket, that no eyes of theirs might ever see; for never again in life did they enter the house of "Maurèspas," and a cruel feast, indeed, was spread that night on the great dining-tables, hastily set together for the occasion—a feast for death—the bodies of the three drowned gentlemen! The storm was quite over by three o'clock in the morning, but the driving rain continued, with the chill wind from the north. The cold was intense, it seemed to us, so suddenly had it come after the heat of that sultry day; and all but my master and myself were still sitting up when Frederick Tanque, my step-father, came to the hall door. He knocked very gently, calling at the same time, in a sad voice, to master Richard; but I was aroused, and went out with my mistress to the porch to hear what his news was. My master still seemed to sleep heavily on the sofa, on which he had thrown himself, half buried in pillows.

"Go back, Aglæa, I implore you," said Master Richard, in an agitated voice, "this is no place for you." She obeyed him mutely; but I remained unnoticed. "Now, speak you, Frederick; what have you to tell us? Did the boat go down?" he asked, hoarsely.

"I fear so, master Richard."

"Are they all lost, Frederick, think you? have you seen any signs of this, and can it be?" Frederick hesitated a moment, then spoke, in a clear whisper; I shall never forget its strange distinctness, and how it thrilled me: "The bodies have drifted to shore, master Richard."

"Oh, God! All three, Frederick?" he gasped.

"All four, master Richard."

The next moment a hand was on his throat.
It was my master, whom we supposed still asleep in the breakfast-room.

"Don't dare to tell me, you accursed villain," he muttered, "that the boy was one of them! Unsay those words, Frederick Tanque! or, choke until you die!"

"For shame, Mr. Mauërpes," said master Richard, interposing firmly, and removing his hand, which fell motionless by his side. "Hear the truth like a man, and conceal it like a gentleman."

"Speak, Frederick," said my master, hoarsely.

"He is with them, sir," said my stepfather; "I am grieved to have to say so, for I loved him like my own; but bear it, master, like a Christian; and see, my mistress is behind you," he added, hastily.

She came forward, weeping bitterly, and wringing her hands. I tried to draw her back, but could not. My master was walking the portico in the darkness now, like one distracted.

We could only trace Frederick Tanque by his lantern, as he strode away, followed by master Richard, who struck after him into the pitch darkness, guided by his light.

"God save their sinful souls," I heard him mutter, as he rushed down the steps, and then was lost to sight. And still, the cold north wind was blowing, and the bitter north rain driving in my face. At last we went into the house, as master harshly bade us do, and crept together close in the breakfast-room, on the broad sofa, covered with the same shawl, and weeping, more from sympathy than sorrow; for, after all, what were any of the victims to my mistress—M. Le Maitre, at the head of them? Nothing, less than nothing; yet, out of our common humanity we mourned for them, and my trouble had cause to be deeper than hers, though I scarcely realized this yet, matters had passed so hurriedly.

About an hour later my master came in, banging the front-door fiercely after him, and walking straight to the sideboard, on which a decanter of brandy was sitting, he poured out a gobletful and drank it off, then turned to my mistress, with a dreadful smile.

"Are you satisfied, at last, madam? Are your prayers to the Virgin fully answered?" he asked, in a cold, unnatural voice. "They are all dead; you hear? your enemies are all dead! Le Maitre, and Gargaroux, and Eugene Mallet—all three drowned, as the bard of Avon has it," laughing bitterly. "Ah, madam, you see I, too, can quote upon occasions."

"Léon, these taunts are too dreadful at such a time. Forbear, I entreat you," cried my mistress, sobbing bitterly.

"I begin to believe, myself, in the efficacy of prayer," he went on in a sneering way, "especially, when directed against those we hate. And you hated them. Why? Simply because they were my friends." He laughed long and loud at this sally, with a terribly hysterical violence.

I was dreadfully frightened; but my mistress, greatly shocked, wept on pitiously, without offering further remonstrance against such unjustifiable treatment, yet, without seeming afraid at all. Indeed, when was she ever afraid?

"So, now, you have me all to yourself, madam," he continued, "as you have wished so long to have me, to hate and torture to the top of your bent; for the comrades of my life are all gone, and you have given me no children to supply their places; and what love was in me is dead from this henceforth; mark me, dead, with the poor frail creature, whose life grew out of mine, and who clung to me beyond all else."

She did not understand him altogether; but, rising, she extended her arms to him with true emotion.

"Oh, Léon," she said, "Oh, my husband, forgive me if I have wronged you, even in thought, and suffer me, still suffer me, to comfort, to love you."

That moment was a pivot, madam, I have since thought, on which their fate was turning. It was an occasion lost. He pushed her rudely away, struck his head with his clenched fist, then shook it fiercely in her face, without touching her, however. She shrieked faintly, staggering back.

"Stop your devilish howling," Le-
thundered forth, "if you don't want to madden me, and dry those cursed crocodile tears before I come again, you and your yellow imp, or, by heavens, madam, it shall fare the worse with both of you."

Then, cramming on his hat and throwing the shawl about him, which he tore from us, he burst from the apartment, and plunged into the cold rainy dawn, down in the direction of the lake shore. He met the men near there, assisted by Master Richard, bearing the bodies to the basement banquetting-room, and so turned back. My mistress had looked herself in her own chamber, partly indignant, partly in pity for my condition, for I was terrified exceedingly, and greatly grieved as well, and we heard nothing more until morning.

The day broke clear and cold, with the norther still blowing fiercely. My mistress went out at sunrise, leaving me asleep, and found Master Richard standing out on the portico, with a telescope in his hand. My master had been quieted, by this time, and was slumbering in his own room—after great excitement, caused partly, it was thought, by the fiery liquor of which he had drunk so deeply during the night.

"Look through this glass, Aglæe," he said to her, "and tell me what you see. My short-sighted eyes may have deceived me." She told my mother all this afterward in my presence, for, as I said, she had left me sleeping.

"I see a floating log, Richard, with a man lying on it, either asleep or dead, or is it the keel of a boat that he is clinging to—an overturned boat? No! he is not dead, only exhausted. He moves his hand; he tries to wave a handkerchief that he holds, but he has not strength, Richard, he has not strength," she cried, "and he will perish miserably."

He took the glass from her nerveless hand, and gazed long and earnestly.

"I see everything now," he said, "as plainly as you do, Aglæe; but the man shall not perish if we have time to get a boat manned to reach him before he loses his hold. I will go to him myself."

Then Master Richard went right to the boat-house, sent for Frederick Tanque to steer, and for two rowers, and when I got down to the shore, where my mistress was waiting, they were all ready to go out after the exhausted man.

"God bless you, Richard," she said, as he turned to grasp her hand before he stepped into the boat; "you are always first in good works." Then she threw her arms about him and kissed him fondly, as I had never seen her do before. I knew she was thinking of her ill-humor to him the night previous, and sorry for it, as she ought to have been; and he felt this, too, I am sure, for the tears stood in his eyes, as he pushed off from shore. I could not help crying, too, from sympathy with him and her, and saying, as she had done, with uplifted hands,

"God bless you, my dear Master Richard."

The lake was still rough, and the progress of the boat was slow; but we watched anxiously for the deliverance of the sufferer, and had the satisfaction, at last, to see him lifted into the boat, and to hail its safe return to shore, with the poor half-dead form they had lifted from the wreck, now helpless as an infant, and only half-conscious.

"Great heavens! It is Claude Roquette," said my mistress, as she looked into his wan face, then poured reviving drops into his blackened lips.

"Lose no time here, Aglæe. Let us bear him to the house. Give me the flask. Have blankets warmed, a bed prepared, women ready to rub him by the time we reach you. Go before us, cousin; we may save him yet."

All this was done in a wonderfully short space of time, and poor M. Roquette was laid in a warm bed and surrounded by attendants, before most persons could have given the mere necessary orders. For my mistress thought of every thing at once, when the hour of need came, though she took her own time usually, and was even careless and forgetful sometimes.

About breakfast-time my master roused up from his stupor and came into the sitting-room, where a cheerful pine-wood
fire was crackling and throwing out a pleasant, balmy smell. The coffee was hot—everything he liked best on the table; but anger and gloom were fixed upon his features.

My mistress was sitting at the head of the table, with her hand upon the silver coffee-pot, when he entered, (I can see her yet), as calm and unconcerned as if nothing had happened. I was at my usual post behind her chair. Master Richard was leaning against the mantel-piece, glancing over the "Delta." I don’t know why I think of all these little things today, or why I trouble you with such small details; but the picture rises before me just as I saw it then, as clearly as if it were painted; and I remember that it seemed to me so hard-hearted that some should be eating and drinking, while others lay dead and cold in the basement below, and poor M. Roquette was wrestling sore with death in the adjoining chamber. But such contrasts must occur, or life would not be life; and it was all right, I suppose.

When all were seated, and the coffee had been served, my master began.

"I understand, madam," he said, "that you have a stranger within your gates this morning, and have been playing Good Samaritan, and all that sort of thing! Ye gods, how I hate hypocrisy! Richard Zavier, you might have caught better fish this morning, than Roquettes, I am thinking."

Master Richard murmured something about "Christian duty," I forget what; but my mistress, fixing her great eyes upon her husband’s face, merely said,

"Let us be thankful, Léon, that any one was saved from that doomed boat."

My master sprang to his feet, and brought down his fist with a great oath, upon the table.

"Do you mean to say," he roared, "that he, too, was in the Petrel? Do you mean to say that the God you worship, or pretend to, suffered those”—and he pointed downward, toward the room in which they were lying dead—"to go down to death, and saved this worm—one wretch, that can not even swim?"

"Such was his will, M. Mauërpas," said Richard Zavier, sternly. "It is not for such as you or I to question it."

"How came this creature in the society of gentlemen?" he went on, wildly. "What had he to do with the Petrel? Why did they not heave out their Jonas upon the waters, when the tempest came? The base-born hound! his presence sunk the boat, I doubt not. Curse him, curse him, now and eternally!"

Madam, these things shock you; but, how can I give you a just idea of M. Mauërpas, otherwise than by giving you such details? There is not much more of this to tell. My master rose from the table, and commenced walking the room, wildly raving about poor Mr. Roquette and his low origin.

"A vile overseer’s son, to lie in the best chambers at Mauërpas! This is what I get for bringing beggars to preside over my household! Misery loves company, they say. Le Maitre dead in the cellar—Roquette alive in the rosewood chamber! God, can it be borne!" Then he laughed bitterly.

"Ah, madam, he was not thinking of Le Maitre or the other two when he raved thus, as you shall hear presently. I was astonished to see how Master Richard bore with him; but he knew every thing as we did not, and pitied him, even while he condemned.

"Why was not Roquette taken to the overseer’s house, madam?" he asked abruptly of my mistress. "The house his father used to occupy, and was kicked out of by me, was surely good enough for him. And why have you been meddling in his recovery, as though it were any interest or business of yours? I demand an answer, madam, and a satisfactory one."

"Mr. Mauërpas! I have done no more than my duty in trying to restore Claude Roquette. All ranks are alike, at a time like this and in sight of God; nor have I ever, at any time, heard or known aught of this young man that was unworthy of the first gentleman in the land. Be satisfied with this answer, I beg; I have no other to give; and let the unpleasant subject drop."

"You are an insolent fool, madam,"
he muttered; "and you, Richard Xavier, are a fanatical one! There, take my parting opinion of you both, and make the best of it. And, mark ye, let this Claude Roquette be removed from here as soon as may be, alive or dead, or—"

He went out, grumbling threats, and strode down again toward the lake-shore. Taking advantage of his absence, and that of my mistress and Master Richard, who went again to Mr. Roquette's room, whither they forbade me to follow them, I glided down the corridor and descended the broad flight of stairs that led to the basement halls below.

It was with a trembling hand that I opened the door of that death-chamber.

There they lay, all three, wrapped in their shrouding sheets, as my mother and the other women had placed them, with their hair still moist from the deadly lake-waters.

M. Le Maitre wore a smile on his grim, handsome face, and his jet-black curls lay close and heavily on his marble-white forehead. He was called the handsomest man in the parish. M. Gargaroux was fearfully changed; his own wife would never have known him. M. Eugène Maillet, the youngest, and the best of the three—where all were bad—seemed to be sleeping tranquilly. Poor fellow! he was to have been married in the coming week, and the shock of his death nearly killed Miss Amélie Landry.

But, apart from these, on a low sofa (one of those on which the tired game-sters were in the habit of sleeping off their excesses, after morning broke, and the night's play was over), lay the young Pedro, the quadroon boy—him I had stolen down to take leave of—him to whom my master had referred so fiercely.

He was a gentle and beautiful creature, a year or two older than myself, and had been my play-mate since I could first remember. He belonged to M. Le Maitre, who had once lived with my master, in their bachelor days, and this boy's mother—the slave of the first—had been their joint housekeeper. She had been dead a long time, and my master and M. Le Maitre had been haggling for years over the price of the boy, whom my master was determined to have some day, I heard him say, if it cost him half his fortune. He was fond of Pedro, and kept him half his time at Maurepas, with Le Maitre's consent.

But, as I have said, the last never could or would agree to receive any reasonable sum for him, and, partly from obstinacy my master hung back from the purchase, which he was still resolved to consummate before Pedro should be grown. Had he been my own brother, I could not have loved him better; and I was kneeling by and crying over the insensible body, with my head on my hands, and parting back sometimes the damp tangled hair, when I saw master come hastily in, and shut the door and lock it after him.

Fortunately, the room was dim, and he did not perceive me as he entered; but my heart was in my throat, and I crept under the sofa as quickly and quietly as possible, and lay trembling there while his feet were almost touching me, for, passing the rest without notice, he came straight to the body of Pedro.

The sounds that reached me from above were strange and appalling—more like the low howls of a wild beast in pain than a human creature in trouble. My master had thrown himself on the corpse, and was kissing it with frantic eagerness. I could hear this; and when I looked at it again, the cold waxen-like face was wet with his tears.

"Oh! Pedro," he murmured; "my boy, my poor, sacrificed boy! the only thing that ever loved me except your dead mother. There you lie, like a stone. Make one sign, my son—but one—then I will believe every thing the priests tell me. Say, can you hear your father? Can you forgive him, that he suffered you so long in other hands? Or, is it all over with you my boy—all over with you, now and eternally."

There was much more, but I remember this only distinctly. After that his voice was choked again with sobs and curses. This was the first time I ever saw my master exhibit human feeling; but all ended in a gloomy silence, and presently he went out, banging the door after him, and I heard his step grow
flainter as it traversed the corridor and then passed out into the garden.

He was going down to the lake-shore, as I found later, to meet the boats that were coming with the friends of the poor dead gentlemen, to take them and Pedro away for burial.

As soon as I could get out with safety, I ran to my mistress, by this time in her own room, to communicate to her all I had seen and heard. She was greatly moved.

"How strange I never suspected this before," she said; "and yet there was certainly a resemblance, now that I think of it—and such an attachment. Unreasonable it might have seemed to me, but for my own fondness for you, Rena."

Then she mused, shaking her head piteously, and shedding silent tears.

"Rena," she said, suddenly, "you can keep your master's secret, I hope, as you have kept some of mine. Nay, you must keep it, or I will never love or trust you again. Remember that you have stolen it, Rena, so to speak, and you must bury it deep, deep as Pedro in a grave."

I understood her perfectly, and bent my head before her, and kissed her hand for all reply, and she was satisfied.

"Poor Léon, he suffers," she said after a time. "Oh! would to God I dared to comfort him. I would give any thing in the world for such a privilege. My duty, certainly, if nothing more."

"Would you give up your letters with the green seal, mistress?" I asked, gravely, impelled by childish curiosity—not impertinence. It was very daring I felt the next moment.

She bent her great, glowing eyes on me, as if to fathom my motive, before she answered,

"Yes, in a moment, child. But, what business is that of yours? You must never dare again to question me on any subject, Rena."

She was greatly agitated, I saw.

"I will go," she said at last, "and see what I can do for him. They have borne the bodies away by this time, I suppose, and he must be very wretched. Come with me, Rena; or, stay—it is still very chilly, I believe; follow me with my shawl. I shall need it."

I was at her heels by the time she reached the portico, with her great crimson cashmere on my arm. Master Richard was still with Claude Roquette, who now needed constant medical attention.

The bodies were being placed in the boats by Frederick Tanque, Julius and the other men, aided by sorrowing friends. One small boat remained, however, moored lower down than the rest, in which a little, old, odd-looking man was seated, gray, and yellow, and snuffy, with his hat off, and with eyes almost bleared with weeping, which he wiped constantly on his red bandana handkerchief. I can see him yet, just as he sat there—our gentle old overseer, whom all the slaves had loved, but who had been dismissed with great harshness, for this very cause every one of them thought. It was old M. Roquette, who had come to learn the fate of his dear and only son, but who had been forbidden to land by my master, and denied all satisfaction as to the condition of Master Claude.

When he saw my mistress standing on the steps of the portico, he extended his hands in a mute, appealing way that was very affecting; but if he said any thing, we could not hear it, with that dreadful wind still blowing.

My mistress did not hesitate one moment—that was her way, madam. When she moved, she was quick as thought to act, and fearless as flame. Snatching her shawl from me, and throwing it around her shoulders, she flew down, bare-headed as she was, to the lake shore. I followed her as fast, trying to pluck her gown and draw her back, for I knew nothing would exasperate my master more than such interference.

The boats had pushed off when we gained the shore—all but old M. Roquette's, which lay rocking and bounding on the unquiet water. My master was cursing and abusing the old man violently.

"You old gray-headed scoundrel," he cried, "be off, before I thrust your feeble life out of your miserable, shriveled body. No man shall transgress my orders, nor
go unpunished; and, as to your son, when he dies—if not dead already—his carcass shall be sent to you. Now, take to your oars in a minute, or—Ha! madam, you here? You seem omnipresent to-day, really."

She did not regard him any more than if he had not spoken, but stepped right on to the boat, and stood so near the gunwale that the water lapped her feet.

She was perfectly splendid that day, still dressed in her white robe and scarlet shawl, with her black hair flying in the wind, her crimson cheeks, her flashing eyes, that gave out such red light sometimes, and her haughty, outstretched hand, waving back all interference.

Old Mr. Roquette crept feebly toward her, wailing like a woman. She leaned forward and clasped his hand, with such a noble, affectionate grace, such a beaming smile, that it did my heart good.

"Don't cry, Mr. Roquette," she said.

"Mr. Claude is doing well; he will live—Dr. Richard Zavier says so—and I will be his nurse by day and night, if needful, until he is restored to you. Don't you believe me, Mr. Roquette?" seeing that the old man shook his head doubtfully.

"Ah! madam," he said in his broken way, "you are one angele! You mean to comfort me, I know; but don't mock my hopes, for God's sake!"

And again he raised his withered hands, and tried to clasp them together—but they trembled so he could not.

"Mr. Roquette, do you see this?"

She had drawn her crucifix from her bosom—the emblem of her faith and his. "By this holy cross I swear to you that what I have said is truth."

My master had stood like one rooted to the spot until this moment. Now he sprung forward, and, seizing her arm, dragged her away, darting a terrible look over his shoulder, with the word "begone" flung toward old Mr. Roquette, coupled with a curse.

I trembled for her safety; but when they reached the portico, his brutal mood seemed relaxed, for, loosing his hold on her shoulder, he pushed her away—and turning into the breakfast-room, lay there all day, his face buried among the sofa pillows.

Toward evening my mistress went to him with kind and loving intentions, carrying a cup of coffee in her hand, by way of excuse for her intrusion.

He raised himself up fiercely, as she entered, gazed at her long and fixedly, then striking the cup from her hand, lay down again with a muttered curse.

I dared not gather up the fragments then; but, withdrawing from the room with my mistress, we went at once to the chamber of Monsieur Roquette, where she commenced that arduous watch that lasted many days, for a nervous fever had set in, and with that poor delicate young man it was almost as fierce a struggle now between life and death as had been waged in the overturned boat.

My master never mentioned Mr. Roquette's name again, but maintained a moody silence, while he remained at Mau- repas, ashamed of his conduct, perhaps, or absorbed in his own grief and disappointment. The behavior of my mistress toward him at this time was more than commonly kind and respectful, but it seemed to make no impression upon him. He rarely noticed her at all, not even to sneer, and gave himself up to gloomy abstraction.

As soon as it was possible to remove him, Master Richard conveyed M. Roquette to his own room, at Claireforte, and there attended him, with the assistance of his father, until he was quite strong and hale again. The poor young man tried to express his thanks to my mistress for all her kindness, the night before he left us, but failed to do more than kiss her hand devoutly, and bathe it with his tears.

All he could stammer out was a prayer that God might permit him to do something to serve her in return—"something, any thing!"

"That time may come sooner than we think, M. Roquette," she said, gravely; "but in the interval, rest assured that your recovery, and the thought of your father's joy have already more than repaid any efforts of mine." In parting, he hung a gay rosary around my neck, and promised me a string of gold beads for New Year's. They came; I have them yet. Each one outweighs a half
eagle, and is beautifully chased and wrought. There were just enough to circle my slender, childish throat.

---

**PART III.**

CIRCUMSTANCES interrupted the narration of Rena, and left me an intervening night of thought and conjecture before she resumed its thread.

Light was gradually breaking over the character of one I had for years supposed to have been an unprincipled intruder on the sacred rights of others, and pity for the noble yet undisciplined youth of Agile Maurepas had already been half substituted for the unmeasured censure I had previously lavished on her memory. Those letters with the green seal accounted for much never explained before. Not one of these had ever met my gaze, although of her own still lay among my papers—impetuous, beautiful, poetic, wrong in principle, yet pure in actual expression, which well might have pointed out such precedents had my mind been less partial and prejudiced, my perceptions perfectly unbiased.

Let this pass for the present. Next morning the quadroon returned, and it was not long before she was once more launched on the tide of narrative, not to be again interrupted, I hoped, until all was revealed.

She began abruptly, contrary to her custom: Soon after Mr. Claude Roquette's recovery, Madame Eugenie Clairmont died very suddenly of disease of the heart. She was Master Richard's mother, and left to his care her three young daughters by a second marriage, and the small plantation she had lived upon—his always by right, since it had been his father's.

M. Clairmont had spent all of her own fine fortune before his death; and though Master Richard owned the place his mother lived on, and the fifty or sixty slaves that worked it, he never had asked for a dollar of the proceeds after he received his medical education, nor even spoken of it as his own property. Even now he felt that he held it partly in trust for his young sisters, and went to live upon it, resolved to think chiefly of their advantage in the conduct of his affairs. He meant still to keep up his practice, and leave all the proceeds of the plantation to accumulate for their use when they should be grown; and I heard him say that he made more in the third year by his medical visits, than his overseer realized from the sugar sales, so popular and so widely known had he become.

He did not come to Maurepas before going home. The blow was so sudden, it quite overpowered him for a time, and he thought chiefly of the poor orphan sisters deprived so unexpectedly of their tender parent. In leaving Claireforte, he empowered young M. Roquette to conduct his business there until his return; and, six weeks later, he came back and got him installed formally as postmaster, and paid down the money as a long loan for the goods in the store near the steamboat landing—the only store in the village. Besides, he presented old Mr. Roquette with the small frame tenement he had occupied so long himself, containing three good rooms and surrounded by a pleasant picketed yard just as full of orange and lemon trees as it could hold. There he had kept his office and drug store, living in his modest way, alone, with no servant but his man Deemah, (my husband, madam, later, as you know—a fine-looking, copper-colored man, with good habits and Christian teachings, and at rest now, I trust, with his Maker.) You never saw two such happy creatures as those Roquettes were from that time forth. They had French ways and wanted but little. They were careful, sober and industrious, so that they felt rich where an American would have thought himself poor. The old man cultivated his little garden and raised the finest vegetables, besides preparing all their simple meals himself, and helping sometimes in the store. Many a bouquet of queer French flowers, such as we never cared to grow at Maurepas—pinks, larkspurs, ragged robins, double marigolds and the like, raised from seeds—he sent to my mistress, and she always placed them in water, and cherished
them as though they had been ever so rare and beautiful, for she would say to me:

"Every one of these has its root in old M. Roquette's heart—a richer soil than we can boast of at Maurépas, Rena, for all our heliotropes or jasmine."

"A beautiful and charitable sentiment, Rena."

"Yes, madam, she was full of such. About a week after Master Richard's departure, and while my master was absent on a visit to M. Landry, one of our card-playing lake neighbors, not to return, we knew, until the following day, my mistress ordered the bay filly and gray pony to be saddled, and set off toward sundown, with me as escort, for Claireforte."

"You will have a bundle to carry as we go home, Rena," she said gayly; "I am going to choose some new dresses for you at M. Roquette's store, if we get there in time."

"The light will be none of the best, mistress," I replied; "had you not better get samples? See, the sun is nearly down already." This was in October.

"We shall see about that when we get there; and, as to being belated, for I know that is in your mind, cautious, cowardly little thing, I have sent word to Julius to meet us half-way on our road home, the other side of the alder grove—we are nearly there, by-the-by. That's a lonesome place to pass, even by moonlight! But I don't mind the rest."

She shook her bridle-rein and plumed hat, and galloped gayly along, singing, as she went, a song she loved—a new song then—very fine, I thought:

"O'er the dark blue waters,  
O'er the salt sea foam,  
Come thou, true-hearted one,  
Come to thy home."

When we reached Claireforte, she dashed right down toward the landing, and stopped at the building in which the post-office was kept, as well as the store of M. Roquette. He did not own it then, nor until some weeks later, but was only head clerk for the proprietor.

He came out to meet her, quite overjoyed, as it seemed, rubbing his hands and smiling, and stammering, as was his way whenever moved in any unusual degree. He could hardly get out his words of welcome; but, assisting her to alight, left me to get off on the sile, and hitch both horses and follow into the store. They were standing at the counter when I went in; my mistress was holding a letter he had just given her, and handing him one in return. I heard her say: "It is a literary whim of mine, M. Roquette, and you must indulge it and keep my secret." He bowed, too full to reply, happy to serve her in any way. It was the first time he had seen her since his recovery. As soon as I approached, she begun to ask for goods.

The goods were soon selected, measured off and put up; and I took the bundle under my arm with a sense of property in its contents, that made it seem quite light and manageable. Then M. Roquette placed my mistress again on her horse; I scrambled on mine as best I could, and, with a grateful greeting of her hand and head to all of the gazing clerks and assistants who came out to stare and wonder at her, we were off again, swift as the wind almost.

It always made my head swim to ride after my mistress when she was at her fleetest. That evening, under the China trees on the river-bank, three miles from Claireforte, we first slackened reins. I never could see why we remember common things so clearly sometimes. There was nothing very remarkable about that ride; yet it recurs to me oftener than any I ever took in my whole life.

I recall the scene and every thing that happened, and every word my mistress spoke, with a strange distinctness that almost makes them seem real again at times. I can still see the young moon, hanging overhead, shaped like an over-set boat—the red lines along the horizon, left by the sun, skirted with green, and purple, and tawny orange—the soft light on the river, so wide and lake-like there—the steamboat passing us in the channel close to the shore, puffing loudly and throwing off brilliant sparks—the dim gray island beyond, planted just in
the middle of the stream, that looked, my mistress said, like some great ghostly ship or giant anchored fast, with its few tall, slender trees for masts (King Arthur's Barge, she called it)—the flatboat lying up close against the bank, with its fire kindled for cooking, around which busy forms were moving, men in blue check shirts and gilt-lined pantaloons, with pipes in their mouths, some with flat tarpaulin hats on, men both black and white. Madam, I see it all, clear as a painted picture.

"This is a common mirage of the mind, Rena."

"The breeze was blowing fresh as we rode along, fresh, but warm," she continued, lifting up her face, as though she still felt its wing on that oppressive, lurid June morning, in the heart of a great city, when not a leaf was stirring; "and my mistress enjoyed it in all its fullness."

"How delicious this evening is!" she said to me, or perhaps to herself. It was her way to speak out when she was thinking. "There is such freedom in the air to-night—such a sense of power! Oh, to be free—to go and come as one lists—unchallenged, like this balmy wind! How glorious a privilege this must be! Enfranchised souls alone enjoy it, though; but I believe, after all, I had rather be a breeze than an angel. I have no wish to quit this fair earth entirely."

"Then you would have no soul, mistress," I ventured to say, impelled by the feeling of religious veneration Master Richard had taught me, perhaps natural to me before. Strangely enough, she started at my voice.

"And what is a soul but a trouble and a plague, child, in this state of fettered existence? And who told you a breeze had no soul? Nay, perhaps, was not itself a living soul? I, for one, choose to believe so from this hour. Mark me, Rena, a breeze is a soul."

"Yes, mistress; but Christ has not told us this, and He knew all things."

I never shall forget the look she gave me. Even in the shadow I saw her laughing, gleaming eyes—with their red fire-fly light.

"Not all things, Rena. There were some He had no experience of and could not know, being divinely pure. Woman's love, for instance—what could He know of it and its willful ways?"

"Oh, mistress," I trembled as I spoke; I went no further than these words in my rebuke of her levity—her blasphemy, it almost seemed to me. But, unheeding my remonstrance, not thinking of me at all, perhaps, she went on declaiming these lines of Mrs. Herman's, that she afterward made me commit to memory, very thrilling as she spoke them. I think I remember them yet. Did you ever hear them, madam? They begin—

"I dream of all things free—
Of a gallant, gallant bark
Fast sailing o'er the sea,
Like an arrow to its mark;
Of a chief his warriors leading
To arm 'neath the greenwood tree;
My heart in chains is bleeding,
But I dream of all things free."

"Yes, I remember them, Rena. You are not quite exact, but that matters not; proceed."

Julius met us at the alder grove, and we got home very pleasantly. Then came the reading of the letter—more rapture, more expressions of delight and admiration, more resolution to cling to the happiness which this correspondence offered her as a compensation for many troubles.

"I will take the good the gods provide," she murmur'd, "at all hazards! Others gamble for gold; I have thrown heart-stakes in this game. Where is the mighty difference?"

I felt my head reel as she spoke these words, and something oppressed my breathing like thick smoke. I clutched at the back of her chair to support myself; then I saw the air filled with gouts of blood falling thick and heavily, more like hot lead than rain it seemed. Then there went a gleam and shiver through the whole, as if glittering steel was running zig-zag like lightning through the shower of blood-clots. Then came
a clash as of swords meeting—(I knew this, somehow, though I had never heard the sound), and I fell to the floor quite insensible. It was hours before I revived fully again; then I awoke clear and well, as if nothing had occurred.

When I told my mistress all this, she seemed much agitated at first, but afterward laughed at me and herself, and chided me for relating such improbable phantasms, as she called it. It seemed to me, then, as if another spirit, not my own, impelled my words in answer to her:

"That is what you are gambling for, dear mistress," I said; "blood and second thrusts—my vision meant that."

"A Daniel come to judgment, yea, a Daniel. I remember with what scorn she spoke these words, after staring at me long and fiercely. At last she placed her hand, in her usual way, upon my shoulder. "Petite," she said, "close those ears of yours when I am speaking to myself, or close those lips of yours when you feel like replying to what was never addressed to you at all. Take your choice; one of these you must do. Which shall it be, petite?"

She spoke most kindly, playfully even (though her words seemed sharp), smiling rather sadly, though, I thought, down into my face.

"The last, dear mistress," I answered; "it shall be the last, for I can not help hearing; but I can help speaking, I suppose."

"Wise owl! this determination confirms my previous opinion of your discretion. Now for a test, Rena! Do you think you can undertake some very special errands for me, and execute them wisely, promptly, faithfully?"

I bowed my head, but said nothing. I was all attention now, all acquiescence.

"I want you to go, Rena, once a fortnight, to M. Roquette for a letter for me—one with a green seal on it. You understand the importance of this by this time. I have bade him deliver these letters to no other hand except mine, and mention them to no one. You must be careful, secret, circumspect.

He understands this arrangement. Can you undertake this office of carrier?"

Of course you know what my answer was—how unhesitating and decided; yet, at that very moment, a strange fear shot through my heart, that made me as cold as death; a dread that I might still be the victim of my own unscrupulous fidelity. But this was soon put away, spurned, even, as though the very thought was self-contempt, and I felt quite nervously to do her bidding.

The matter was never again discussed between us. She was one of those persons who never taunted one with useless charges, and warnings, and counsels, having once decided to confide.

Two weeks from this time she sent me back to Claireforle for a letter. It was daylight when I set out, and I got back before breakfast-time. My master was already up and walking about, something unusual for him. Mistress was still in her chamber.

"You are early out this morning, Rena?" he said, meeting me suddenly at the turn of the carriage-road. "What the devil was your errand?" I did not speak—I could not. Fortunately, my deep sun-bonnet concealed my face; but, for all answer, I showed him a small package of lace buttons I had bought from M. Roquette to sew on my mistress' new cambric wrappers.

He thrust his hands in his pockets, elevated his eyebrows, whistled, and walked on quite unsuspicious and unconcerned, as it seemed; but I took care thenceforth, never to meet my master, and to watch for him cautiously.

When I went again to Claireforle, I carried a letter to be posted, and brought back another to my mistress; and so matters went on pretty smoothly and safely for more than a year.

In the meantime, Master Richard Zavier had come and gone many times. He paid us a visit once a month, although his plantation was more than a hundred miles away, and still brought Deemah with him every time. That was the way I got used to him, madam, for it was from the affection of habit, only, I ever came to marry my husband.
Poor, foolish wretch that I was. I had no heart to give. 

Rena sighed, crimsoned, turned away. There was a tear in her eye when she bent it on me once more, that never fell, but seemed swallowed back again into the depth of the black, lustrous orb from whence it sprung. 

I thought I penetrated the secret of that reluctant drop! It is sacred with me.

It was at New Year, I remember, that Master Richard paid us one of his monthly visits. He brought my mistress a beautiful rosewood writing-desk, richly inlaid and filled with exquisite paper, sealing-wax and pens—all she could want for correspondence. There was a seal, too, one of her own devising, which he had caused to be engraved on an onyx stone, set in gold, for her. It represented a falcon hooded, perched on a hand, to the wrist of which it was fastened by a chain. Above were inscribed the words in French, “Je verrais.”

How well I recognized Rena’s description. 

“Ah, Richard, this is too much,” she said, smiling through her tears, “that you should have recollected this whim of mine, mentioned and forgotten by me so long ago; it is, indeed, most kind and unexpected. The seal is beautiful. I shall always use it hereafter, in my choicest correspondence.” Stooping, she kissed his forehead lightly, suddenly.

I saw that he was agitated. “You remind me at once, dear coz, in your playful, ironical way, what a dead letter after all this seal must be to you, and how useless a present I have brought, since you have no correspondents! That Ariel affair is over, of course. Besides, it was altogether one-sided, while it lasted; you never replied, Agile!”

He spoke interrogatively, hesitating between each of these last words, most painfully, I thought.

“What an idea, Richard. After all, what made you think of that so suddenly? I thought the matter was dropped by tacit consent between us long ago.” She spoke playfully, with sparkling eyes.

“I hope so, at least, Agile,” he answered gravely, “for the good of all; and now, dear coz, I want you to make me a promise.” He took her hand and looked her steadily in the face as he spoke. “Promise me that your name and picture shall be ever sacredly withheld from all anonymous or unknown correspondents, however earnestly solicited. Promise me this, Agile, if you love me—if you respect yourself and me!”

“I do, Richard,” she answered with downcast eyes and real feeling I could see. “I do most sacrately promise you to observe this reasonable request.”

“More, Agile, more! Promise me—”

She laid her ivory fingers across his lips, while a shadow of severity crossed her countenance, interrupting thus what he would fain have added.

“No more, Richard! I will promise nothing more; nor must you ask it. Neither will I reply to any questions on this subject. My soul is absolutely my own, until God calls for it.”

He put her hand aside; he groaned and bent his head down upon his hands. When he looked up she was gone. I was alone with him, engaged in binding the velvet slippers my mistress had embroidered for his New-Year’s gift, and seated in my low chair in the chimney-corner.

“What do you know of all this, Rena?” he asked. I stared at him vaguely; the cold dew came to my forehead. What could I refuse to tell Master Richard should he persist in asking me? “Say,” he said, rising impulsively; and, coming toward me, he stood before me, placing his hand on my head so as to raise my face and force me to look upward. “Does she still receive those letters with the green seal? Does she write in return? You know—observant, intelligent as you are, you know all that she does. For her sake answer me. Rena! these questions are not vain! You can help me to pluck her back from the abyss toward which she is drifting, and your duty is plain before you.”

I hesitated for one moment only
"Master Richard," I said, firmly, "you told me once that it was as bad as eavesdropping for any one to try and find out what was not intended for him to know; I have always tried to keep this rule ever since."

He lifted his hand from my brow, and raised it to his own. "My God!" he said, "my God, I see how it is! I saw it from the first; yet I am fallen low indeed, to deserve such a rebuke as that, and from such lips!"

"Master Richard," I said; "dear Master Richard," dropping my work and falling on my knees before him; "I did not mean to be impertinent, indeed I did not. If you wanted my heart's blood, you should have it. Nay, forgive me; don't be angry with me, dear Master Richard; I could not live and bear it!"

"Child, foolish child, get up! There! gather your work from the hearth before it is scorched. Wipe your eyes; be quiet; you unman me; and heaven knows the burden I have to bear is already sufficient for my strength." He hesitated. "Be faithful, be pure of heart, and withal be silent. All may yet go well. Noble natures are self-purifying. Good wine works, through its fermentation, to keep for ages." He was speaking to himself now, I well knew. "Thus will her heart, I trust! Poor sacrificed child."

He mused long, standing there by the hearth, never even looking at me again, gazing into the embers as though he could read the future in the wavering coals. At last he wheeled off suddenly—and left the room. A moment later I heard my mistress talking to him on the portico. Through the open window I heard her urging him to marry Miss Sophie Landry, the sister of the young lady who was engaged to M. Eugène Mallet, and a lovely girl as the sun ever shone upon.

He was warding off the matter as well as he could, without being too positive, when, all at once, I heard her say:

"Richard, I do begin to believe you have a previous attachment that makes you adhere so obstinately to your bache-

lor's estate. Answer me truly, cousin; is it so?"

His voice was husky and broken, as he said: "I, too, may be permitted, I trust, to have my reservation, Agile. This is a subject on which you must not touch again—must not, mark me, cousin."

"Oh Richard, Richard, how hard you are! I thought you told me every thing." She was sobbing bitterly now, I could hear, but he was impossibly silent. He came to the window at last, and looked in. Madam, his face was like a piece of stone!

"Bring some cologne for your mistress, Rena, quickly; and a vail. The air is too chilly out here; her eyes suffer." There needed no such explanation for me. I flew for the articles, carried them to her myself. As I had supposed, her eyes were red with weeping; but he did not offer to assist her in any way, or to soothe her, but sat by perfectly passive. And so they separated, coldly at last.

"This seems very inconsistent with what you have told me of Richard Zavier, Rena—a piece of petty, spiteful malice only. How did you account for it?"

"Oh, madam, it was not in her nature to suffer dumbly as he did. He was always locked up and cold when in deep trouble; that was his way. And her words had stirred the deep waters! They were thoughtless, to say no more."

"You do not think—"

"Oh! madam, do not ask me what I think," she interrupted hastily, "only what I know. You, too, may have your thoughts, perhaps, before I end my story—of me, as well as others. If so, I beseech you not to utter them or to question me, of what must even seem uncertain, because never expressed or explained."

The rest of that visit of Master Richard's was a very sad one. He was talking most of the time thereafter of his lost mother, of his dear young sisters, and the good governess he had obtained for them—an English lady, middle-aged and highly educated, and what comfort
he promised himself from their progress and prosperity. He spoke, too, much
of his anxiety for the eternal welfare of my mistress, and begged her to read
some books that he would send her, carefully and constantly. But she would
not promise to do so, and this grieved him, I could see.

On New Year's day my master had
his usual grand dinner party. My mis-
tress was beautiful in her ruby-colored
velvet, and diamonds, and Mechlin laces.

Poor Master Richard! That day
how I pitied him. Every thing seemed
to jar upon his feelings, and he rose, on
some slight plea, and went out to wan-
der, before the dessert was laid. But
my mistress was gayer than I ever had
seen her. I saw her start once, though;
it was when my master called to Julius
to bring in the new champagne with the
green seal. I, too, felt chilled for a
moment; but he meant no more than he
said. It seems it was some rare wine
just from Europe, that his commission
merchant had sent him with many other
brands.

But, as I have told you, matters went
on securely, with regard to the letters,
for a year or more, and in this time my
mistress lived her full life of happiness.

About this time a shadow of suspicion
seemed to fall over my master's mind.
How it first gathered there, I never knew,
except from his own observation. Old
Pierre Riviere and his family could
have had no clue to my business at
Claireforte. I had always done small
erands in the shopping line for my
mistress, and went no oftener now than
before. Young Roquette, we knew,
would have died at the stake before
making the slightest revelation to any
one, even to his own father, on the sub-
ject of my mistress' concerns, and Mas-
ter Richard was not to be thought of in
such a connection, even if he had known
what he only conjectured.

I was the first to suspect my master's
suspicions, from his own manner to my
mistress, which she never observed at
all. He would watch her often, at that
time, through his half-closed eyes, with
a sort of sneering smile upon his features

that I knew of old, muttering to himself,
sometimes, after she had passed him—
muttering and cursing low, and laughing
bitterly, as if his very soul was steeped
in gall and wormwood.

When I told my mother and step-
father of this strange habit of his, add-
ing that it made me fear for her safety, but
never mentioning a syllable of my own
suspicions as to its cause, they seemed to
think it was his own embarrassments—
debts and losses at play, that were press-
ing on him and goading him almost to
madness.

One of our men was hired as head
steward on a New Orleans packet, and
had heard his master's affairs freely dis-
cussed by various parties, more than
once at the table, and gathered that he
was on the brink of ruin.

"We shall all be sold at public ven-
due, and that will be the end of it," said
Frederick Tanque, gloomily. "Fami-
lies will be scattered, homes broken up,
comforts destroyed, and, worst of all, the
poor young mistress—what is to become
of her?"

"What, indeed!" echoed my trem-
bling mother, who had never forgotten
that day on which the horsewhip fell,
for her sake, on those snow-white should-
ers. "Blessed angel! Poor, sweet,
beautiful bird! The thought of her
trouble is harder to bear than all. You,
too, my poor Rena; raised like a lady,
unfit for hardship—what will become of
you?"

"Oh, I am to be free, you know,
mother," I said, cheerfully. "Don't fret
about me. Don't you remember how
master gave a deed for me to my mis-
tress, when she first took me to wait on
her? He offered to buy her a diamond
cross to match those her father gave her,
she told me; but she said she would pre-
fer a deed for me, and that was because
she meant to set me free whenever I got
married."

Frederick Tanque shook his head.
"What did that scrap of writing amount
to, Rena? Just done to please her, and
to save the diamonds—that was all!
You belong to master as much as you
ever did, and will go where the rest go,
I understand it all; the more the pity, for that's half my trouble."

"But, Master Richard had it all attended to I tell you, Papa Frederick. Ten days afterward it was recorded, he called it. I have often heard him say so, and mistress went to see about it, herself, about two years ago, with Master Richard. He made her go and read it with her own eyes in a book at the courthouse. 'For that is all the property you have in this world, Aglaé,' I heard him say; 'now be sure it is secured to you. I may be dead when this question arises, and you must know your own affairs. Besides, in justice to the poor spoiled child, you ought to be able to carry out your good intentions.' I am quite sure of all this," I added. This soothed them greatly; still they conjectured all sorts of suffering for my mistress, should the plantation be sacrificed, and were much amazed to hear me boldly assert that she could support herself by writing books, as ladies in the North did, while I washed her clothes and prepared her meals and saved her all petty vexations.

As for my master, I took no concern for his welfare. He was out of the question. The very mildest fate I craved for him was the eternal calaboose! Not so Frederick Tanque. He yearned over him with a strange, almost fraternal affection, for they had been boys together, playfellows, and, so far, he had been seldom mistreated by his master—that is to say, not in any very violent way, beyond curses and rough words, which all about him had to hear. Later his feelings altered, for the sake of one he loved as his own child, and reared, for her white blood, as he could not have done for offspring of his—the daughter of his wife.

That wife, that mother, lived not to see the day he prophesied, though near at hand, and I thank God for it! But Frederick Tanque—a proud man, if a slave—survived to pass under the yoke of another, harsher rule; and finally died fighting desperately in the swamps. Madam, I will not pierce your tender heart with that history, nor rouse my own; but, this much I believe—the master of slaves has a very different account to render for the trifling away of property, from him who lets houses, or ships, or stock slip from him, or lands even. He has human souls to reckon about with his God!

Rena bent forward on her hands, as she frequently did, in one of those pauses which, with her, usually succeeded every passionate outbreak; and again I waited many minutes, silently, if not impatiently, for her to resume her tedious and digressive, yet ever earnest and deeply impressive narrative.

"Your master grew suspicious, Rena?" I said, at last. "Did he betray this openly, and how? I hope poor M. Roquette did not suffer?" The question roused her.

"No, no indeed. He was beyond his reach. It was on Master Richard that the storm burst forth at last. It was a strange freak in my master, that, after their long cousinly friendship and intimate weekly association, lasting through years, now that Master Richard came but once a month, at most, and was far more reserved than formerly in his manner—and that my mistress thought less about him than she had ever done before, even if she cared as much—this sudden make-believe jealousy should arise like a tempest, and sweep all scruples before it."

It was all in connection with this correspondence which my master had somehow scented out—blindly, though, at best, and not to his own satisfaction, knowing merely of its existence. How, I never could tell. There was nothing else that he objected to; he never even pretended that there was.

I never knew how he opened the subject to a man he respected as he did respect Richard Xavier, in spite of all his bad treatment and scornful ways toward him. I was passing by the library door where they both were, when I saw Master Richard, pale as a corpse, standing before my master, defending himself earnestly, with uplifted hand, from some charge that had been brought against him. I could not forbear lingering a
moment in the corridor to hear what he was saying.

“But I swear to you, by all that is sacred to man, that you are deceived,” I heard Richard Zavier say. “I must not be so wronged. Produce your evidence—you say you have it, and make your charge more distinct than the mere insinuation you have urged, of unjust and clandestine effort to divide man and wife. I am incapable of any thing of the kind, M. Maurepas. After all, what are you driving at? Speak out, or swallow your own words!”

“I have made some rules in my house on the subject of letter-writing,” my master replied, coolly, “with which you have been interfering of late, I suspect, by a clandestine and underhand manner. Letters arrive almost weekly for Madame Maurepas, not one of which she suffers me to see or hear of, when she can help it. This savors of conspiracy, Richard Zavier! and you are undoubtedly the author of these secret and closely-sealed epistles.”

“Is it thus you approach me with your proofs, M. Maurepas?” said Master Richard, scornfully. “I demand these! The time is past for questions and replies to which courtesy, justice even, might have given precedence over positive assertion, unsupported as this is by one bare fact.”

“You deny this, then, Dr. Zavier? Do I so understand you?” My master rose.

“I have already denied all intent to injure you,” said Master Richard, with a suddenly faltering tongue and downcast head. New thoughts had come to cow him. You would have thought him the criminal then, madam, had you seen him. I knew that some mighty struggle was waged in his noble heart, beyond any eye of man to penetrate. The iron had entered his soul; he cared only to save her now.

In another moment, in obedience to my own summons, my mistress had entered the room, and stood calmly before them. “What is the matter, Richard?” she said. “M. Maurepas, what is this? Are you not quarreling, and about me? Oh, I hope not, I hope not!”

My master faced her with a bitter smile. Master Richard still stood, silent and downcast. She continued to look eagerly for some time from one to the other, with outstretched hands.

“Have I any thing to do with this affair?” she asked, at last. “I have a right to know.”

“Every thing, madam, every thing,” replied her husband, fiercely. “I was just interrogating Richard Zavier on the subject of that interesting correspondence you and he have been conducting so successfully, ever since (I suppose so, at least), the rosewood desk and its contents came to Maurepas. I ask to be enlightened. Will you,” grinding his words between his clinched teeth, “favor me with an explanation?”

“Of what, M. Maurepas?”

I was amazed at her calmness, though she, too, had grown white as death.

“Of the contents of these letters, and their intent and purpose, if you please, madam,” he pursued, more coolly, “the letters of Madame Maurepas, and Dr. Richard Zavier, I mean. You understand me perfectly,” he sneered.

“None such have ever been written that I know of, M. Maurepas.”

“Aglae!” The word of warning, probably against the greater danger toward which she was drifting, broke from the lips of Richard Zavier in tones of agony indescribably pathetic. A whole world of self-sacrifice and heart-broken disappointment and regret seemed in that one familiar word—of reproach, perhaps.

“You stand convicted, madam, by that reproving tone,” said my master, severely, but without so far losing the dignity he had assumed on this occasion. “Your accomplice is too conscientious, it seems, to sustain your shallow falsehood. Henceforth, it is best that you see each other’s faces no more. Go, Richard Zavier, and be thankful that you take your life with you. As for you, madam,” and he advanced as if to seize her arm, but she sprung aside and avoided him.

“I must be heard,” she said, lifting high her hand, in which was clinched
that small, sharp dagger she often wore. "I, who have never uttered a lie. Now, I swear, sacredly swear, in the sight of God, that Richard Zavier is innocent of this correspondence, if such there be; and that to him the pain of such revelation, were it true, would exceed any thing a tyrant and a despot like you, Léon Maurèpas, could feel or suffer from such a cause."

"Beware, madam; beware how you enrage me beyond appeal," cried my master, his eyes growing bloodshot as he spoke. "You have more reason than you know of to tremble—even if what you assert be true."

"To tremble," she repeated, with a curl of scorn on her lip, while her cheeks grew crimson, and that look came to her eyes, so terrible to all who saw it. "It is you who should tremble, dastard that you are. Do you know what it is for matter to contend with spirit? I will teach you, Léon Maurèpas. There is lightning enough in my veins to blast you as you stand. Approach me one step nearer if you dare—if you dare!"

And again she lifted the clinched poignard, with a wild and bitter laugh that froze my blood. "Tyrant, I defy you!" she cried.

Madam, this was the first time she had ever spoken a disrespectful word to him in her life, or evidenced temper beyond mere looks. It sobered him strangely for a few moments. He seemed surprised, confounded even, and looked appealingly to Richard Zavier.

"After all," he said, "Cousin Richard, you may be as much in the dark about this matter as I am. Help me to get things straight again, if you can, and lead that mad woman away."

"Touch me at your peril, Richard Zavier," she cried, as he approached her; she was excited now—almost beyond the power of discriminating between friend and foe—her eyes were filled with that terrible red light. Master Richard returned to the position he had left, and stood again, with downcast eyes and folded arms, in the window, cut to the very heart of hearts, I saw.

I burst into the room now with wild and frantic weeping, and falling down, seized my mistress round her knees, begging her for the love of God to come away. She followed me mutely. Then they were left together, those miserable men. What occurred we knew not further than this—that Master Richard left Maurèpas that evening, to return no more, and that my master, a few days later, went off, none knew whither, and was absent a month, at the expiration of which time he returned and was received by my mistress as urbanely as if nothing had ever occurred to disturb their peace.

My master was more respectful and attentive to her than he had been for months, and brought her various presents, books even, which he had seldom given her before. She never read one of these, I remarked, but laid them away, untouched, in their splendid bindings, in the library. I saw, however, what she did not appear to notice, that his watchfulness was unabated, and that he scarcely left the house now, or suffered her to do so unattended. I had been closely watched, I knew, by Pierre Rivière and his family during my master's absence; but nothing had been discovered, although I had gone twice to Claireforte for letters, and had brought back, on one of these occasions, a miniature to my mistress of her unseen correspondent.

"Did you see it, Rena?" I asked, not without emotion.

"Yes, madam, once. My mistress never showed it to me again, because I said Master Richard was the handsomer. I liked his clear, dark, pale face better than that fair, florid countenance, with its great blue eyes, waving golden hair and pointed beard."

"Do you remember the style of features, Rena?" The question was impulsive and irresistible.

"Napoleonesque," my mistress called it, I remember, madam. The name struck me as strange, and I retained it; the features were fine, I think, the face rather short and broad, the under lip full, the upper long, pointed and smiling, both very red—a brilliant face, like
sunshine, but not sweet and steady like Master Richard’s. The shoulders were broad, I remember, and I saw at a glance that they belonged to a powerfully made man. The picture was painted on ivory and set in gold, to be fastened to a chain.”

“Did she wear it always, Rena?”

“No, madam, not then; she was afraid to do this. She concealed it with her letters, in the sandal-wood box. While my master was gone, she caused a small square opening to be made in the floor under her bedstead, and nicely joined again, with a movable lid. They were hidden there, the letters and the picture. Frederick Tanque did the work for her, with his own hands, and she enjoined him to silence.”

“How determined she must have been on her course—how reckless even,” I murmured.

“Madam, her life was in these letters. She could not give them up. She used to tell me that matters had changed places with her strangely since this correspondence entered into her very soul. Realities had grown to seem but shadows now, and these shadows had come to be her sole realities. Life was nothing to her without this love!”

“Ah, Rena, would that she had died then!”

The quadroon gazed sadly at me for a moment.

“Ay, madam, I can say amen to this with a pure conscience. Would she had died then; but the vision that struck me to the floor insensible was not given for nothing, and she was appointed to live and see the dark tissue completed—steel and blood had still their work to do!”

I gasped back a reply, unnoticed by her as she sat, with her head bent down upon her bosom, her hands clasped, her feet thrust forward, her whole attitude one of self-absorbed melancholy. I determined to interrupt her no more—that is, if I found it possible to restrain myself. It was so long before she roused again from these moods of silent abstraction, that interest itself could scarcely sustain my patience, I feared, to the end of her digressive narrative. It was some time before she again proceeded.

It was nearly a fortnight after my master’s sudden return, when I set forth one evening to go to Clairofet for a letter, carrying another carefully concealed in my bosom to be posted by young M. Roquette. There were two roads to the village; one led through the swamp, longer and less pleasant than the river road, but far more private. I took this one on this occasion, and saw nothing more startling than a gopher, a squirrel, a parrot, or a moccasin-snake on the road, until I reached the post-office. I hitched my pony, and went in through the back door of the building—a long, dark, narrow store, with the post-office in the rear, when I saw my master come up the front steps, immediately facing me, but nearly a hundred feet off. I was sure he did not observe me, but I shrank into the shadow, prepared to remain silently there until M. Roquette should come down in my direction. The store was quite full of customers, and I knew I might have to wait a long time where there were so many to serve, unless some one came for a letter.

It was not many minutes, however, before I saw my master and M. Roquette walking down the store together toward the post-office. I shrank behind the side counter, and they passed without observing me.

They went into the office, which was so near that I could hear every word they spoke from the low seat I occupied, through the latticed partition.

“You have acted in defiance of the law, M. Mauèpas,” I heard M. Roquette say, after a moment, “in turning over all those letters and reading their superscriptions; but I hope at last you are satisfied. There is none, you see, for your wife.”

“And do you pretend to say, you infernal little puppy,” my master said, “that none such ever pass through your hands? No palaver now; answer me directly, sir, directly.”

“Put your questions plainly: I hard-ly understand you,” stammered M. Roquette.

“Listen, then, imbécile, and comprehend. Do letters, directed to Madame Aglaë Mauèpas, come to your post-office,
or do they not? Be careful how you evade this straightforward question. I have a right to know, and I shall consult the registers if I have reason to think you are lying to me, cowardly little hound! with a terrible oath that I will spare you, madam. "Prick up your ears and answer, then, on peril of—"

"I am willing to take my oath in a court of justice," interrupted M. Roquette, not frightened now, but determined, I knew from the sound of his voice, "that no such letters come to this post-office, or pass through my hands. Madame Maurépas has no correspondents that I know of. Now, sir, spare me your insults, and your presence on these premises in the future, L'entrait!"

This last word was spoken more like an order than a prayer, I thought. I was astonished at Mr. Claude's spirit, and so would you have been, madam, could you have seen him—a little man, with a small, sleek, black head, carried chiefly on one side; a short, smiling, sallow face, and a step like the hop of a canary bird. But he had a fearless eye, I remember that, and was as quick with a pistol as any one, though it was against his conscience to go armed.

"What did you give for these goods, Roquette, and what price did your father pay for his house? tell me that before I leave your presence," my master asked in his most insulting tone.

Not knowing his suspicions, M. Roquette could not imagine of course that he was accusing him of trickery.

"My gratitude, Monsieur Maurépas, that was the price I paid," replied Mr. Claude, warmly.

"Are you sure your honor was not included, Roquette? A small matter is thrown in, sometimes, when a good bargain is concluded between friends, and that would have scarcely been an additional feather's weight, I take it."

The intention was apparent now! M. Roquette's voice was altered with rage when he replied: "Do not estimate mine by your own, M. Maurépas, or you may do some one injustice." He stammered when excited. "And now, M. Maurépas, if your search is over, we will part on the terms I at first suggested, if you please—eternally, sir, and immediately."

"With all my heart, M. Roquette, until it suits my convenience to come again. Is that the packet I hear blowing off steam? I must be off right speedily. I have business to settle at the landing," and to my great relief my master rushed forth and galloped off.

"That will detain him half an hour at least," I thought. "Let me hurry and be gone." In another moment the letter I held was exchanged for one sealed with the green seal, and directed to Va bére, and I was again galloping homeward, by the river road this time. I was afraid of the swamp, so late—afraid of getting lost when the dusk should close, which would be the case before I reached Maurépas. Besides that, I felt sure my pony would carry me half way home before master thought of leaving the steamboat.

I was mistaken. Just as I got opposite that island which my mistress called, from some whim, "King Arthur's Burge"—the same I described before, with its dim outlines and gigantic trees, like masts—I heard the quick thud and habitual blow of master's great bay horse, "Cortez," and glancing behind, I saw him coming after me in a hard hand gallop. But he did not call to me to stop, as I feared he would, nor pass me and wait for me, as I dreaded he might do; but, as soon as he got quite close to me, he slackened rein and kept behind me in a leisurely way for more than a mile, so that my suspicions were almost disarmed when we reached the alder grove. I had no opportunity—not the slightest—all this time to make any provision for the safety of the letter, in case he should suspect and seize me for examination. It lay concealed in my bosom, it is true; but this would have been no safeguard had he determined to possess it, I well knew. My worst fears were realized at last, though unexpectedly, too, for I had begun to hope I might reach home undisturbed. When we entered the alder grove, my master stopped and called to me to halt,
which I did instantly, trembling in every limb. He never kept his cruel eye off of me, I knew and felt all this time, except for one instant, when he dismounted to hitch his horse to a low hanging limb, and turned his back on me for a moment. That instant was worth every thing to me. Quick as light I had transferred the precious letter from my bosom to a hole I remembered to have seen that day under the flap of the old saddle I was riding on, and had thrust it in far among the stuffing when he turned again. I had matured this plan as I rode along before him, and, come what might, I felt now that she was saved, and drew a long breath of relief, even though I saw him cutting switch after switch from the elder bushes, and watching me closely all the time with his cat-like, cruel eyes, that spoke as plainly as words what his intentions were.

At last he spoke to me: "Rena, where is that letter M. Roquetté gave you this evening for your mistress?"

"What letter, master?" I asked, trembling like a poplar leaf.

"You know well enough what letter I mean, deceitful minx," he answered. "Dismount. I shall whip you until you tell me the truth or hand me the letter."

It was vain to think of resistance. I got off my pony and hitched him where he motioned to me to fasten him, which was done carelessly enough, it seemed later, for he broke loose and galloped home like mad, and that brought Frederick Tanque to see about me, as you shall hear, but not until life was nearly gone, and vengeance itself satisfied.

Madam, I spare you the dreadful details. This was the first time I had ever been whipped; it was the last. Suffice it to say, I was resolute throughout, to die rather than betray my mistress. It is not so hard as people think to keep such a resolution when the mind is once excited. It is in the beginning of punishment that one's spirit quails. It seems to rise, the more the body suffers—the more the blood flows, so that I can understand how those old martyrs sung amid curling flames, and died in ecstasy that rose above their fiendish destruction, though terrified at the dreadful preparations, and finally got in such a state of mind they could not yield.

The last I remember of my suffering was the thought that I was dying, and for her! Then I felt Frederick Tanque untying the cravat with which my master had fastened my hands behind me, and bathing my face with brandy, and pouring some down my lips, perhaps—I do not know; then all was dark.

Afterward, I heard that he had threatened his master's life on this occasion; but whether this was true or not, I know not. If so, M. Mauvrat had the prudence or generosity to pass it by unpunished; but, from that hour, Frederick Tanque hated his master far more than he had ever loved him, and relaxed all his previous efforts to take care of his affairs, about which he had been so faithful and untiring. As for my mother, I shall always think the shock of my condition killed her, weak and sickly as she was, and wholly unprepared for such treatment in my case, petted and defended by my mistress as I had been. She broke a blood vessel then, and died within the year. But, as I have said, it was all the better for her (seeing how matters were bound to go), that she should be cold in her grave.

"But your mistress, Rena?"

"Ah, madam, my first thought on coming to myself was of her, and I whispered, they said: 'Don't tell her how he whipped me,' to those around, then relapsed again into partial unconsciousness, from time to time muttering her name."

"She came to you, of course?"

"He would not let her! He kept her locked in her own chamber for a week, forbidding any one to approach her except the daughter of old Pierre Rivière—Phoebe, a bad and deceitful girl, his principal spy, and we all thought too near to the master by half. During this time, the servants heard my mistress moaning piteously, and calling for me and her cousin Richard. At last, Julius, our waiter, forced his way in with a cup of tea—when my master had gone down
to the lake, and begged her on his knees to drink it, for she would take nothing but ice water. He took this occasion to tell her all he knew of me—that he had seen me sitting up that day—the fifth from that fearful ride, and that the doctor said I would soon be out again, and able to attend her as usual.

"Do, dear mistress," he said, "bear up better. Master Richard will soon be here; he has been sent for to come to you, I believe."

This was a story of his, madam, just to get her to eat and drink, and to rouse her up. So she took the tea and toast that he had carried her, and rallied from that hour, but looked vainly for her cousin Richard. As for Phoebe, the power Julius had, kept her silent, for he knew of some theses she had committed, and held a rod over her through this knowledge. A day or two after, urgent letters came from New Orleans and my master left hurriedly, leaving old Pierre in charge of watch and ward.

But my mistress was herself again by this time, for I had crept up to her chamber-door, feebly, it is true. She sent through me for Julius and Frederick Tanque, and ordered them to expel Pierre and Phoebe from her house, and to bring back to her service her favorite woman, Rhoda; and when my master returned, a week later, things were going on pretty much in the old order of management. He never said a word—to show that he disapproved—if, indeed, he was not really relieved by the stand my mistress had taken.

Before I forget, let me tell you she never got that letter which I had stuffed into the saddle. When I got well enough to search for it, I could not find it, and soon after my mother gave the saddle away to her old fellow-servant, Deemah’s mother, madam. The saddle belonged to my mother; but she knew she should never be able to ride again.

It came to me at last. Years afterward I ripped up the saddle, and found the letter where I had never been able to reach it before. I knew it at once by the green seal, and here it is, madam. I have brought it to show you that this is not all a dream I have been telling, but true as death. Read it some day, for her sake, and take care of it, for it is the only link left now of that long chain of correspondence. Perhaps you will recognize your relative’s handwriting!" She looked at me sharply.

I did, indeed, recognize the noble and peculiar character of one who once had been fatally dear to me; but I could not trust myself then to read that impassioned letter, confirming in every line the truth of Rena’s past and subsequent assertions. Placing the letter in my pocket with as much coolness as I could command, I begged her to continue her narrative, promising to read it at some future day, and make a just disposition of its contents. She seemed satisfied of my good intentions, and, after enjoining me to entire secrecy, she proceeded, in her rambling and desultory mode, with her story of the “Green Seal,” still far, it seemed, from its culmination.

A month or more passed by in a kind of peaceable gloom, after my master’s return. My mistress and he seldom met, except at meals. She could not bear to be thrown with him an instant alone, and shuddered if he even accidentally touched her—so darkly had her hatred for him gathered force—since his outrage to me and his insults to Master Richard. That panther look I have tried to describe to you, was seldom out of her eyes now, when they fell on him, even when she saw him at a distance, and those burning spots rose to her cheek, whenever he addressed me, that always showed anger or excitement, in her case. They came and went, like flame.

“Did you bring her any more letters, Rena?” I asked, nervously.

“No, madam; Frederick Tanque went to M. Roquette by night for her letters, thenceforth. She wrote an order to this effect, and I think Mr. Claude pretty well understood, after my master’s behavior in his store, the necessity of concealment, believing always, as he did, that this was a mere literary correspondence—to which every lady of taste and education was entitled. It did
Frederick Tanque good to baffle his master, and to help my mistress in any way. He never stopped to ask questions. Of course he thought she knew her own affairs best, and would do nothing to hurt herself.

Those letters were her whole comfort now, and she would write sheet after sheet in reply, sometimes shedding tears above them, always pressing her lips upon them before she folded and sent them away. I noticed she always sealed them now—with the seal Master Richard had given her, and once I heard her say:

"Je verrai!—yes—I shall see, indeed, when this wretched chain is broken and the 'hand' lifted from my eyes; but not as Richard meant—in heaven! Je verrai on earth, which is a still more agreeable prospect, I fancy."

My master was truly very wretched about this time, and, perhaps, had my mistress known the whole truth, she might have softened toward him, as she had done before when he was in trouble. His losses were pressing heavily upon him; his creditors were losing patience, and hounding him at the law; his commission merchants refused him further advances, and he knew not where to turn. He had quarreled with Master Richard, the only true friend he had, and was at dagger's points with Madame Zavier, his wife's mother; so that he had no one to advise with. Several times I thought he was on the point of making some communication to my mistress; but she always waived him off with a sort of horror that had newly come to her eye and manner toward him. He felt this change, I am sure. He had never realized before how bitterly she could hate, or how insensible she could become.

It was a desperate time to both.

He sent for her, one day, by Julius, to meet him in the library for an hour's conversation, and she agreed to go if she might take me with her. No objection was made to this, and I sat at the doorstep while they conversed, listening painfully to every word they spoke, and filled with vague apprehensions of what might come to pass.

He meant to be very calm, I think; but her manner irritated him from the first. There was such evident boating, in every look and gesture, though she said but little, if any thing, to offend him until he had thrown off all disguise, and had shown his hideous nature without a mask.

"I want you to write to Richard Zavier, Aglaë, and ask him to lend you five thousand dollars for three months. I will go your security for the repayment punctually, and when the money comes, you shall go to New Orleans with me, if you like."

"I can not do this, M. Maurépas," she answered, without hesitation. "I have no claims on that money or that gentleman after what has passed. I can not comprehend your conduct, I confess. It is inscrutable to me."

"Are you quite sure, Aglaë, that you have no right to this money?" he kissed in her ear. "When a woman makes such sacrifices for a man as you have made for your Cousin Richard, she has certain claims—acknowledged in morals if not in law."

"There is one thing I am quite sure of," she said, as cold as ice, drawing away from him as she spoke. "That you have none, whatever mine may be. More, M. Maurépas, I know that you do not believe one syllable of your own base insinuations. You mean to torture me because you can, that is all. But, thank God, you have lost all power to move me by any words of yours. I, that was wax once, in your cruel hands, am hardened into stone."

He looked at her with a cold, incredible sneer; then, sitting down to the table, wrote a few lines which he handed to her, with a pen filled with ink.

"Sign that paper, Aglaë," he said, calmly. "Here, lay it on this book," handing her one, "a name is soon written."

"Not so soon expunged," she replied, after glancing over the paper. Then pushing it away, she added: "I am at a loss to understand, M. Maurépas, how you can expect me to coöperate with you in asking this or any other favor of Richard Zavier."
“My magnanimity is surprising, even to myself,” he said, shrugging his shoulders, and standing before her; “but, the truth is, I am inclined to make allowances for circumstances, and my necessities are urgent—temporary embarrassments only, however. Come, make no further objections. Sign this like a good girl, and let us be friends again.”

She dashed down the pen. “Never,” she cried. “I will never sign such a request, promptly as I know it would be complied with; nor should you ask me such a thing, after the contumely you have heaped on my noble, unoffending kinsman. Where is your pride, M. Maurepas?”

“In the dust, where you have laid it, madam,” he sneered, bowing low.

“You speak falsely, sir, and you know it. As far as you can know, I have never humiliated you or myself. What I may do remains to be seen, M. Maurepas.”

“Do you threaten me, madam? Do you dare to gnaw your chain? Girl, you overstep your limits. Thank heaven, your opportunities are small, and they shall be still less in future. But, what is the use of trying to reason? There, take your seat at the table; write a letter to Richard Zavier with my approval. Ask him to come back to Maurepas, if you like; have it your own way; work it as you will. Pave the way for reconciliation, and, when I get him here, I can obtain the loan without your important cooperation.”

“I will not write him for such a purpose,” she replied sternly; “nor, on consideration, have I any reason to suppose that, after your unjust treatment, he would receive a letter directed to him in my handwriting; or, if received, on my own account, reply to it at all. I shall never ask him to return, M. Maurepas.”

Then, with a wail I can never forget, she cried out: “I have lost my Cousin Richard!”

She clasped her hands in a mute, agonized way, and bowed her face over them. She had never fully realized this loss before (she told me this afterward), nor what a blank it would leave in her existence.

“And is he so dear to you,” my mas-
that slow, fixed, terrible smile, as she turned the weapon over and over admiringly, passing it now close to her eyes, as a child does a prism, then holding it away at arm's-length again, as one does a beautiful jewel, to admire. Oh! God, was she going mad, or, did she meditate murder? These thoughts swept through me and nerved me to break the spell. I gave way to a passion of grief, and, falling at her feet, I cried out piteously:

"Oh, mistress, mistress! for sweet Jesus' sake, don't kill my poor, wicked master!"

She spoke with strange clearness, in a voice whose sound was exultant, even to my ear, and not husky and broken as I had expected to hear it.

"Child, child, I would not hurt one hair of his head," she said, "to be queen of all this world!"

"It is yourself, then, dear mistress, you mean to harm. I know it is your own sweet life that you are going to destroy; and, oh! my mistress, think of dear Master Richard and all his teachings, and his great grief, and mine and Madame Zavier's, when we feel that heaven is closed forever against you, a suicide. Tell me, dear mistress, are you going to die?"

I looked up in her face with streaming eyes, and she bent tenderly above me. The dreadful smile was gone now, and a sweet seriousness had replaced it. Tears, too, were on her cheek—tears of relief.

"No, Rena, no!" she replied, "I am not going to die. I am only going to begin to live! My chains are broken now, and I am free, as you, too, shall be, dear child, after a season. Your Master Richard shall not be troubled by any rash act of mine, if I can help it, for we must be secret as the grave; you and I, Rena," whispering clearly, "we will fly together. The way is plain before us, and I shall live my new life." Adding, with her finger on her lip, "I am going to him."

PART IV.

My Scheherezade was interrupted, on this occasion, by the unexpected entrance of my husband, who had returned earlier in the evening than usual from his place of business. He had already been back some days from Cuba, but had never chanced to confront my quadroon laundress. She eyed him vigilantly, I saw, drawing comparisons evidently between his face and its "counterfeit presentment" on the walls, as her dark eyes flashed from one to the other, and apparently well satisfied with the result of this scrutiny, rested at last, dreamily, on the floor.

When he had gone out again she took up the thread of her story—which had probably made the theme of her musings—without an intervening remark, and with a sort of careless abruptness that might have besemiroyalty:

"Of course you know, madam, who she meant by 'him.' Young as I was, and simple, I understood at once, and a sort of terror took possession of me, when I thought of that smiling, cruel, face (no blood relation of yours, I am glad to hear, lady), and what would be our fate if we fell into such hands? But I said nothing, and weeks passed before my mistress made mention of her purpose again. By this time she had received another letter, sealed with the "Green Seal," and I heard her talking to it and over it, as she always did when those morsels of witchcraft came; and in this way I knew what her plan was, and that she was going to meet Mr. Adrian, who had been long, as I knew before, entreating her to come to him as soon as she had an opportunity.

"We are to go to Boston, Rena," she said, "where I can make my livelihood with my pen and be independent of every body, and Mr. Adrian insures me employment, for he has great influence with the journals, some of which have already published my pieces, though without paying me, so far; and we are to live with his sister—you and I—until the time comes to break my chains, not a hard thing to do in that free country where there are no slaves—no weary women, as I am told, bound in relentless marriage yokes, as in this lovely land where nature rebukes humanity."

Then she sat awhile with her small white hands clasped, and her eyes cast up in that pretty way she had, which always made
me feel as if she were praying, though I do not know that she was; and presently she broke out again, very suddenly:

"I shall burn my bridges as I go, Rena, like a great General of old times, and leave no vestige behind by which I can be traced, even by your Master Richard. They can imagine me dead, if the worst comes—mother and all the rest—and you know how easily people forget their dead! What is inevitable is always borne with courage. It is, indeed, a beautiful order that it should be so! M. Maurèpas will get him another wife, who will bear him the children he craves, and when two years have come and gone I shall be happy with a noble husband. Yes, Adrian," she murmured, "I will repose evermore on your honor and fidelity."

"May I tell my mother, mistress," I ventured to ask, "of this plan of yours? She would never betray you, I am sure, nor would Frederick Tanque."

"No, child, not for worlds," adding, carelessly, "but you need not go with me unless you choose, Rena."

I answered only by humbly kissing her hand; but, even then, I was meditating perfidy! Oh, madam, from love, not hate, I was about to play the part of Judas Iscariot, and give her up into the hands of her friends, not her enemies—yet all the same I was to step in between her and happiness forever."

The quadroon sat with her hands locked and her head bowed over them, in a penitential attitude, evidently lost in thought, when I roused her with a question:

"And where was M. Maurèpas all this time, Rena? Was there no effort on his part at reconciliation with his justly offended wife?"

"At home, madam—at home, walking the house like a caged panther day and night, sorry enough, no doubt, for what he had done, but never daring to come near my mistress, who commonly kept bolt and bar between them. Sometimes she would throw open her windows and sit by them, however, and at such times he was always sure to pass on the galleries, but there was a look in her eyes like frozen fire that was hard to meet and that frightened even him, and he left her to herself. That look cowed him and made him quiet, so that even I began to pity him in my heart, for the gift is not given to every one to hate any more than to love as my mistress could."

But she only laughed coldly when I spoke of his trouble, and turned away, saying, very bitterly, I thought, in clear, calm tones:

"May his trouble never be less, Rena, but I will not wish it for my own sake."

"Mistress," I could not help exclaiming, "does not Jesus Christ tell us to forgive?"

"How can we forgive when we are not angry?" she asked in turn. "M. Maurèpas is simply dead to me, and I should be as divine as our Savior himself could I bid the dead live again. Did you ever try to kindle a fire with ashes, Rena?"

I hung my head; I understood her then. All was over between them, and forever; yet he was her husband, and I had heard Master Richard say what a solemn bond marriage was—one never to be broken in our holy church—"a tie as long as life and as strong as death," he called it.

It was to Master Richard I betrayed her.

I had been taught to write legibly by my mistress, though with great difficulty. Somehow I never took to writing as I did to other things, and my hand would cramp terribly in copying out long words, and though I could spell very well off the book, when I tried to write down my thoughts all the letters would get jumbled together in my mind and the words would look strange to me on paper.

The hardest work I have ever undertaken in my life was writing that long letter to Master Richard. I was a week about it, for I had to choose my time when my mistress was busy with her papers, or sitting like one in a dream, forgetful of all about her. But I did not fold up or seal my letter until I had heard her say when she was going to leave Maurèpas, and where Mr. Adrian was to meet her. He was to be at
Memphis, on the first of December, she said, (after getting another letter from him) and would wait for her there until she found an opportunity to leave home during my master's absence.

We knew he would be obliged to go to New Orleans, early in that month, but he never told any one what day he meant to go or to return. So we were all packed, waiting many days. And now, let me tell you, madam, my mistress put aside all books and jewels and fine dresses he had given her, and locked them in the Armoire, leaving the key with my mother and placing in her trunks only a few plain clothes and the remains of her marriage trousseau—her diamonds, her Cashmere shawl—gifts from her dead father; also the bag of gold pieces Madame Zavier had given her for private expenses on her wedding morning, not one of which she had ever touched, for my master was liberal enough as far as money went, and liked to see her dress fine and spend freely when they went to the cities together. It pleased him well to see all the lorgnettes pointed at her at the opera house at New Orleans, though he would tantalize her about it afterward.

He never loved her better, I believe, than when she treated him with such cold scorn. After his last bad behavior I am sure he could have crawled to her feet during those last weeks at Maurépas, but for the fear he had of her fiery, flashing eyes, and that look of frozen flame (madam, I can give it no better name), she turned upon him, whenever he crossed her presence.

"He is no more to me," I heard her murmur one day as he went by her window like a shadow, "than the scorpion that crawls on the wall; but I will not let him sting me if I can help it! Yet, I would harm no creature willingly."

Mr. Grimshaw, his commission merchant from New Orleans, arrived about this time and stayed a week at Maurépas, walking about every where with my master, examining the sugar-houses and the engine carefully, and jotting down notes of every thing in his memorandum-book, and getting a list of the negroes, with every name written out in full, from the oldest down to the youngest. But this my mistress never knew, and Frederick Tanque bade me keep it from her.

On the eighth or tenth of December my master went to New Orleans with Mr. Grimshaw, and from that moment my mistress was on the watch for a steambout to take her away in an opposite direction, for, as I have said, she had been ready to go for many days past. Once in every four or five hours she sent to Mr. Roquette to know when the next packet would touch at Claire-forte, and the morning after my master left home the young man wrote to me that the propeller Palestine was expected between sundown and dark, that evening. Then our arrangements were made at once to go in the Palestine. The barouche was ordered and Julius drove us over, while Frederick Tanque followed in the spring-wagon with our light baggage. The servants thought we were going to visit Madame Zavier, at her place, Les Boccages, between Natchez and Vicksburg, for a few days, and, as it turned out, they were not far from right, but of our real intention they had no idea.

Once only my mistress came near betraying herself, and that was in parting with Mr. Roquette, who was all attention, and insisted upon putting on board a basket of his famous sweet oranges from trees Master Richard had grafted in his little garden, and gave my mistress his arm to lead her safely to the cabin, for it was quite dark when the steamer Palestine came sparkling along.

"Good-by, Mr. Roquette," I heard her say. "May all prosperity be yours, and if ever you see my cousin Richard again, tell him—but no! I will send no messages!" and she checked herself suddenly.

"I see how it is, Madame Maurépas," said Mr. Roquette, in a low, tearful voice; "you are never coming back again," adding, after a pause: "May God bless you, madam, wherever you are."

She laughed with a real ring in her voice that surprised me, for I was ready to burst out crying all the time, and trembling like a leaf.

"How tragical we all are to-night,
Mr. Roquette! But, I suppose it is because I go so seldom from home that such solemn partings occur! I can't tell what has become of my cheerfulness. Farewell," giving him her hand; "and be sure to be the first to welcome me when I come home;" and she turned joyfully from Mr. Roquette, who left us, no doubt, perfectly convinced of her sincerity.

That was the first time I had ever accused my mistress secretly of being deceitful.

But, just as if this gayety had been a mantle she had worn for a time and unclasped at the throat and let fall to the floor when she was tired of it, did her behavior change when she found herself alone with me in her state-room. A countenance of deeper woe I never saw than was hers, as she sat leaning back against the wall, with her eyes closed and her face half turned aside, and her locked hands lying loosely on her lap.

She refused to go out to the supper-table, but I went to the steward and brought her a cup of tea and a cracker, and she ate it mechanically, just as a child takes its food from a nurse's hand, but seemed little better afterward—lying in her berth and moaning low all night, in a piteous way that kept sleep from my eyes.

At five o'clock in the morning we blew off steam at Natchez where we were to tie to an hour—and, on hearing this, I got off and went to the guard to see the city as well as I could below the hill, and watch the drays come down the bluffs piled with cotton, and the deckhands going and coming by the light of blazing torches—for the fog hung heavy over everything, and it was a dark and dreary dawn, cheerless as midnight.

A carriage drove up, almost below the guard over which I was hanging, and, unable to go further on account of the cotton-bales, stopped at some distance from the plank. I saw a gentleman get out slowly, wearing his arm in a sling. Just at that moment a passing torch flashed on his face, and I knew my master Richard. He looked very white in that strong yellow light, and walked feebly, I thought, leaning as was not his habit on a cane. My heart beat wildly as I saw him come on board, to make inquiries of us I knew, but I said nothing about his presence to my mistress when I went back to her state-room. She was already awake, however, if indeed she had slept at all during that uneasy night, and spoke to me as I entered.

"I must get up and dress myself soon," she said. "I want to see 'Les Boccages' once more as we pass by, and I am not certain how many hours' run it is from Natchez. I took 'no note of time' when I went there three years ago. Everything was so different then."

"Yes, my dear mistress," I thought to myself, "that dreadful serpent-seal had not then twisted itself about your heart. You were as free then, for all your home-toubles, as a bird on a bush." But I said nothing, and went to work at once to assist her to dress, taking down her long, black hair, which reached to her knees, and combing it carefully, though with trembling hands, then arranging it in the French twist and coils she always wore, and which so well became her small and graceful head. Then she threw on her black silk gown and crimson shawl, and with a lace veil over her head, went out on the guard to watch for "Les Boccages." I had taken her a cup of coffee, all she would taste. I never saw her cheeks so pale, nor her eye so bright, as on that gray, dreary morning, nor her mouth of such a burning red. She looked just like a beautiful vision, madam, I once saw painted of a transfigured saint.

About an hour later I heard her utter a faint cry, and, looking out from the state-room door, I saw Master Richard standing beside her.

"We are bound to the same point, I suppose, Aglaé," I heard him say. "I am afraid you, too, have had bad news from 'Les Boccages.'"

She did not answer, but looked at him in strange, confused silence, lifting her hand to her head, gasping as if overwhelmed.

"Is it my mother?" she asked, pitifully, at last.
prived of a share of it, if it can be rightfully, honorably obtained. True love and pure love, such as hers, must be right, it seems to me, in spite of all the preachers tell us; and my poor mistress would have been more blest to have had her will for one month and then to have died, than to have lived all those empty years. She would at least have lived and died happy.

"There are better things than such happiness, Rena, known to the human soul," I said, sternly.

"What, madam, what?" she asked, defiantly.

"God's approval—man's esteem—our own self-respect and satisfied conscience. Nay, even the opinion of the world is much."

"What was the world to her, madam? What could it ever have been? She had never cared for it, or its opinions. She who was not like other people—so every one said that knew her; but willful and sweet and loving as a little child, and perhaps not much more responsible, if all was known."

She shook her head sternly. "No, madam, she was done to death by being thwarted, and I was one of those that helped to destroy her, through ill-judged affection. I believe that she had a right to love Mr. Adrian, as had he to love her—that no man should have dared gainsay." "These are shocking sentiments, Rena. I am sorry to hear you utter them. I suppose, however, you imbibed them from your mistress."

"No, madam, no! She never unclosed her lips to speak such words. They came to me through my own sorrow and remorse. I said to myself, 'These two suited one another and their partners did not suit them. God made them suitable, and what say had man in the matter? None that I can see—none that I can understand. Their very souls went forth on wings like to get acquainted. Perhaps they were married angels in heaven, who knows, before they came to this sinful earth at all!' I said more. 'Would not the husband lying in his grave be nearer to me—more living if I had loved him well—than the husband
with his head on my pillow that I did not love? Why should men and women be tied together like leashed hounds, making each other wicked and woful, when each one could be happy, free and independent with a mate of his or her own choosing? I asked myself these questions many and many a miserable day, when it was too late to ask them, and I came to think that the sin against the Holy Ghost is to divide true love—the unpardonable sin, madam.”

I saw how unprofitable, and even undignified on my part, a discussion on this subject would be between Rena and myself—one on which she was evidently warped against her finer instincts; and I sought to bring her back to her clue of story by hazarding one remark—a personal one, very painful to me.

“But, Rena, you have already said Mr. Adrian had a cruel face! How could you think he could, in any way, have contributed to the happiness of your mistress?”

“Oh, madam, perhaps it was the false life he led with the wife he never loved that gave him this look and shook his principles. With my sweet mistress, who seemed to be his fate as he was surely hers, all might have been entirely different.”

“Yes, yes,” I rejoined, hastily. “I see what you mean; but I fancy you are mistaken.” I would have said: “I, too, knew this man—cold, brilliant, fascinating; and understand what he might have been to such a woman as Aglaë Maurèpas,” but I was silent with a stab in my heart, that, in its very poignancy of pain, taught me to yearn over one I had so long condemned and censured, too stringently by half.

Already was the self-appointed court melting before the pleadings of this humble Portia, and the dread demand that had once been urged by the plaintiff for “a pound of flesh,” cut from the quivering heart of a rival, was repudiated now.

Pity, mercy, forgiveness, were all at work in the breast of one long insensible to either, as far as finite natures could feel or offer them. The words of the quadroon had found their way to conviction; and the truth of her assertion—“the wife he never loved, and who never suited him”—conjured up a vision of what might have been had the wife of “Adrian” been “Valérie,” the being of fire and air with her Cleopatra-like variety, her resilient nature.

“Yes, this was the woman,” I thought, “who alone could have chained his fickle fancy and captivated his fateful eye and taste—perhaps even reached a heart, undiscovered by another! She might have supplied the wants of his whole nature, and developed the God that was in him—the slumbering deity.”

But, it was no time for reflections like these. I sought to untangle a skein and seize a clue to a story too long a matter of mystery to me, whose right to such knowledge was unimpeachable. Digression and reverie were alike out of place under such circumstances.

“My mistress never uncovered her face again,” continued Rena, until master Richard touched her arm to point out “Les Bocages,” her mother’s place, that we were now approaching in the bend of the river. The white cottage-house, covered with multiform vines, was not more than a hundred yards distant from the wood-landing, and like a person walking in sleep, my mistress suffered herself to be led on shore.

We saw no one on the portico, and when we had entered the house, all was silent. Then Aunt Polly, Madame Zavier’s housekeeper, came out to receive us, and we were shown into the library, while, at some signal from master Richard, she disappeared before my mistress had time to question her, and we were left alone, thinking she had gone to apprise Madame Zavier.

“Now, cousin Richard,” said my mistress, firmly, “you must tell me, before I go to my mother’s room, which of my brothers is injured, and how so, that I may be prepared for the worst.”

“Your mother is not at home, cousin Aglaë,” said my master Richard, calmly. “She went yesterday to Natchez, where Francis is confined to his bed, (his wife had written to your mother to this effect,) with a fractured limb. Not ill, however, by any means, for I
have just seen him. Bernard and Jacques are with her, and Eugene, you know, is at Oakland University, so that we find ourselves here alone, and I am glad of it, for I have a strange revelation to make to you."

She glanced at his wounded arm, and the blood forsook her cheek. She had not before perceived it in her bewilderment.

"You have had a difficulty with your husband—you have killed M. Maurèpas," she cried, clasping her hands wildly.

"Oh, Richard, was it for me? I trust not—I trust not!"

"I have not seen M. Maurèpas since we parted in your presence," he made answer. "My difficulty has been a very different one," hesitating long before he added: "I have just been to Memphis."

As he spoke he eyed her sternly.

She uttered a long, low shriek, and covered her face with her hands, then looked up again suddenly, pale, tearless, and with flashing eyes.

"What business had you there?" she asked, confronting him proudly with a bitter smile. "May I take the liberty of inquiring, Richard Zavier?"

"I went there to anticipate your meeting with Mr. Adrian," he answered. "As the oldest male representative of your blood I went thither to prevent a stain on your hitherto spotless honor."

"And you killed him?"

Her head dropped on her bosom, her hands on her knees as she spoke, like one utterly hopeless.

"No, Aglaë," said my Master Richard, calmly. "I only tried to kill him. The villain escaped with his accursed life."

"This from you, Richard Zavier?"

"This from me, Aglaë Maurèpas."

"You have brought me here on a fool's errand," she exclaimed, passionately, "but you shall not mar my intention. I will yet join Mr. Adrian!"

"Never, my cousin, never!" shaking his head.

"Prevent me at your peril, sir!" and she rose before him, and flashed upon him a look that seemed to wither him as he stood. He staggered feebly to a chair, fell back in it, and closed his eyes like one about to faint. His wound was bleeding, but we did not know it then.

"I shall proceed to Memphis on the first packet that woods at Les Bocages," said my mistress, firmly. "In the mean time acquaint me, if you please, what you mean by interfering in my literary engagements, and how you received information of my movements? I insist upon an answer to these questions. I hold you to account, Richard Zavier!"

Standing behind my mistress, I uttered an exclamation that made Master Richard look up. He caught my eye, and the expression I read in his, prevented my revelation. It froze me into silence again.

"A letter, addressed to me, in a clerkly superscription" (the truth was, I had requested one of M. Roquette's clerks to direct it for me, the day I mailed it myself) "reached me in time to permit me to reach Memphis before the fatal first of December," said my Master Richard, faintly, "and in accordance with what I deemed my duty, I waited there the arrival of Mr. Adrian—for such was his assumed name. His real one you shall never know from me, Aglaë. Suffice it to say, we settled our affairs with pistols on the third, and were both slightly wounded. He has gone home to his wife and family, a wiser and better man, I trust—having learned that Southern women are held too sacred with their kindred to be tampered with, by prying Yankee scoundrels. He has gone home, Aglaë, cured of his folly, believe me; but not until he had signed this paper."

He rose with a great effort and drew from his pocket a folded document, and, staggering feebly to the door, threw it at her feet as he passed her. A moment later, just after I had picked up the paper and handed it to my mistress who clutched it eagerly, I heard a fall in the corridor, and Aunt Polly and I reached Master Richard at the same moment. He was lying covered with blood and quite insensible on the floor. Fortunately the neighboring physician lived hard by, and he came very promptly and bound Master Richard's arm, and administered reviving remedies, and he was soon made comfortable, though so
weak that he did not leave his bed for many days.

During all this time my mistress never went near him, nor, indeed, when I returned to tell her of Master Richard’s condition, did she pay any attention to what I said, sitting as she was like a stone and wholly taken up with that fatal paper which contained Mr. Adrian’s sworn renunciation, and which she read over and over with moving lips and straining eyes until I feared it would madden her. So, after every thing was done for Master Richard that we could do, Aunt Polly and I led my mistress to her own chamber, the beautiful blue room which Madame Zavier kept for guests, and placed her on the sofa drawn up before the fire, with shawls and pillows around her, while, all the time, she looked like a frozen creature, and felt like one, chilly as ice as she was, lying like a person in a dreadful dream, which is only half believed to be real. Oh, madam, that was a trying time indeed!

Aunt Polly would have brought in the doctor who came to see Master Richard, but I would not let her, knowing my mistress as I did, and feeling sure that she would revive best if left to herself and me. The other servants were all carefully excluded. The paper Master Richard had given her she had hidden by this time in her bosom, and while she lived no human eye except her own ever rested on it again.

“What did it contain, Rena?”

“I have it here madam, if you would like to see it. I brought it purposely;” and she drew from her worn pocket-book a paper yellowed by time, with a signature affixed in a well-known hand.

“It was a solemn oath, as you will see, she pursued, “on the part of the signor, Master Richard said, never again to see or to hold correspondence with “Valerie,” or the person he knew as such; an oath that had been compelled from him by my Master Richard, who never told him the name of my mistress.

Years afterward Deenah told me this, but I suspected it at the time, and so did she, my mistress I mean; and madam, was it not strange? She forgave him on the strength of his cowardice, as she never could have done for his abandonment. She pitied rather than scorned him for his weakness, as you might suppose a fiery nature like hers would not have done—she who feared nothing on earth or in heaven, herself! That proved to me, more than every thing besides, the power of her love for Mr. Adrian.

“And did she never hear from him again, Rena? Did she never write to him?”

“No, madam, she never did, either the one or the other. She believed in keeping promises, and would not for worlds have tempted him to break the oath he swore to Master Richard.”

“But, he had persuaded her to ignore her marriage vow, Rena, as he had done his own. This seems inconsistent.”

“I heard my mistress say one day that the Roman people struck their slaves when they set them free, and that, in this way she had received her freedom from my master’s own hand. She never felt that she owed him any duty from that moment, madam. She ceased to feel ever after, that she belonged to him or was his wife. As to Mr. Adrian, my mistress had never suspected that he was not a single man until she heard what Master Richard said, and read that written “renunciation;” that was what they called it I remember; but, it contained a confession besides, a confession that Adrian was not his real name, and though he mentioned no other, that he was a married man. After this, of course, my mistress had nothing more to do with him in any way; but the whole thing was kept secret by Master Richard’s advice.

He wrote her a long letter as soon as he could grasp a pen, that was the day before Madame Zavier came home, and strange to say it governed her behavior. He did not urge her to go home to Maurepas, though he advised it; but he enjoined her whatever she did to let no one know what motive she had in making that journey, or what Mr. Adrian had been to her; and so she was prepared to meet Madame Zavier with
the explanation which was surely true, in one sense if not in another, that her husband's ill-treatment had driven her from a home to which she would return no more under any circumstances, even if compelled to make her living by the work of her own hands. Madame Xavier received her tenderly and tearfully, with true motherhood. She who had sold her daughter for a price could not bear now to have it paid, nor to take cruel blows that bruised that tender flesh, as part of the contract. Yet, from the first she might have known what must have occurred between them, in the very nature of things, unsuited as they were."

"You are a philosopher, Rena."

"I don't know, madam, that I understand the word, but, if it means that I see every thing just as it is, perhaps I am. I sometimes wish that God had not made me so clear-sighted," and she shook her head, smiling wistfully.

"After my mistress came to herself," she resumed, "she spent much time in considering who could have informed Master Richard of her design of joining Mr. Adrian at Memphis. But for that warning glance I should have fallen on my knees before her and confessed the whole, but that cold, commanding eye rose ever before me when I thought to speak, and the words were stayed on my lips as if I had still been in Master Richard's presence.

"It must have been Mr. Roquette," she said at last, "and he obtained his information from Frederick Tanque, no doubt; and your mother, I suppose, plucked out your secret, poor Rena, against your will, and even against your knowledge. I was wrong to confide in one so young, wrong to have confided in any one, and yet, I am safe in their hands, I feel."

"O, mistress, it was all for the best," I ventured to say meekly, "since you hear now that Mr. Adrian was a married gentleman."

"In heaven there is no marriage, nor giving in marriage, we are told, and had it come to the worst we could have died together," she said, casting her eyes up and clasping her hands on her bosom."

"Besides, there was divorce for him as well as for me in that land of liberty. We could have waited patiently."

"But our dear church, mistress, forbids divorce, Master Richard says. Would you leave the Holy Catholic church for any man?"

"Have I not told you never to question me, Rena? Little fool, do you suppose I need give up my church because it chooses to cast me forth from its bosom for a mere difference of opinion? My creed is my own, and no displeasure of church or priest could change that. What difference whether I went to mass or prayed alone in my chamber before my crucifix, as I did for years at Maurepas?"

She was talking to herself, I knew, and not to me, so I forbore to answer.

"As for Richard Xavier," she continued, "he has crushed me as he would not have done the worm in his path—as no other living being could have done—can ever do again—not Adrian himself. But, oh, my love! It was not just in you to forsake me thus, even though the cruel Spanish steel threatened your heart's blood. Not just! Yet I thank heaven your precious life is spared, even if for eternal desolation."

And she shook her head sorrowfully while tears ran down her cheeks. Her voice was so tender when she spoke the words, that it sounded like the cooing of a dove; but it fired every drop of my blood to see her weep.

"Oh, mistress," I cried passionately, "I want you to hate Mr. Adrian, for his mean behavior. I wish Master Richard had killed him, before he signed that paper."

"He has done nothing to me to make me hate him," she said calmly. "If he loved his life better than his troth to me, I have no word to say. It is not given to all men to be strong and brave, like cruel Richard Xavier; nor to be constant, like wicked Maurepas." She smiled bitterly as she spoke these words. "Besides that, he had a wife and children to live for; he had no right to die for one he had never seen except in dreams—except in dreams!" shaking
her head again, drearily. Then she went on: "Had he spoken lightly of me, matters would have been different—or even carelessly; but he did not, or oh, how gladly my cruel kinsman would have told me every word. For one such I would have slain him with my own hand, even had I been obliged to reach him across the mountains. But as it is, we part in peace and love, and I can live upon the past through all the future."

I knew she still kept his letters in her sandalwood box, and that she referred to these.

"I wonder you did not burn them, Rena, in your practical humanity," I observed.

"No, madam, no; I knew what comfort they would prove to her in her long, lonely years; but it was an office she performed herself one day, very suddenly, as you shall hear."

"Were hers never applied for, Rena?"

"Yes, madam, I believe so, without her knowledge though, by Master Richard; but the answer came that they had all been honorably destroyed—each as it was received."

I groaned aloud. Here was another link yet wanting in the chain of iniquity. Those letters, with their fairy seal, and the motto, "Je verrois," had met the eyes of his wife, I knew, lying carelessly in his secretary, and had aided in their mutual estrangement. That he preserved them, therefore, was a certainty, and, perhaps, "Valerie" would have preferred that he should have done so, since it seemed she never made the slightest effort to regain them. They might have prevented oblivion, if no more.

"What occurred after all this, Rena?"

"I will tell you, madam, if you will take patience to follow me in my own way, for I get all in confusion if you want to hurry me. As my eyes saw and my ears heard, I speak. I can not put it all together quick as scholars can. I am obliged to walk step by step, up my ladder—even crawl sometimes for fear of falling down; but all that it befits you to know about my mistress you shall learn presently."

The effort Master Richard made to write that long letter to my mistress threw him back, I suppose, for, after that, he was quite ill again, and the doctor came and forbade him to read or write, or to have much light in his chamber, and made him take quinine and port wine, and such like, and sago jelly by the pint, for his appetite had failed and he seemed to be fading away for want of heart to eat, or smile, or care for any thing.

But a great shock roused him. It was always so with that family—the Zaviers, I mean—they came to their feet when the need was, sick or well, living or dying, "equal to the emergency," as Madame Zavier said, whatever that might be. So that the very day after Doctor Duroc had pronounced my Master Richard an ill man he was up and dressed and ready to take the boat for New Orleans, having notified Deemah to meet him with fresh linen at his plantation landing, so that he might accompany him below.

I was sitting at the foot of Master Richard's bed, in the shadow, when Aunt Polly came in, followed by Mr. Jules La Coste, one of our near neighbors at Maurèpas, who went up to him cordially and then sat down by his pillow, near the half-open window, before which was placed a table for his iced-water and medicines. A crack of light came through the parted shutters, for Master Richard could not submit to total darkness, and it fell on the two faces, leaning close together as they talked, and thus I saw them.

"I have a letter for you from M. Maurèpas, Dr. Zavier," said Mr. La Coste, suddenly, laying it on the counterpane as he spoke—"one that requires an answer, which I hope you will be able to make satisfactory."

"I am neither able to write nor read to-day," said my Master Richard; "but I can hear and think as well as ever I could; so perhaps you will do me the favor to read this letter aloud to me, Mr. La Coste—that is, if you already know the contents," he added, placing his hand upon it to wait for a reply, then removing it as Mr. La Coste said briefly:
"I do know them, I regret to say."

"Then read," said Richard Zavier, savagely.

It was a letter from my master, accusing my Master Richard of having persuaded away his wife from his roof and protection, and of having met her by appointment at Natchez and gone with her to "Les Bocages" during the absence of her mother, for wrong purposes, and it ended by challenging him to fight with him a "duello," when and where he chose, and with what arms he might select, or to be branded as a coward forever, as well as a destroyer of female honor; adding that Mr. Jules La Coste would act as his friend on the occasion, and was empowered to arrange everything with the second of Dr. Zavier.

There was a silence in the room after the letter had been read that lasted a few minutes, during which you could have heard a pin fall. Madam, I thought the beatings of my heart must have betrayed my presence, so still was the chamber, and so loud did they sound in my own ears. But, I sat spell-bound, and soon my Master Richard spoke in clear, calm tones:

"I can not accept this challenge conscientiously, Mr. La Coste," he made reply. "I have done nothing to deserve it. I am innocent of all offense, such as he at least would deem offense, against the wife of M. Maurèpas."

"An explanation will, no doubt, be thankfully received," said Mr. Jules La Coste, eagerly. "It was in this hope, and as the friend of both, that I undertook this office. What shall I say to M. Maurèpas, since you are too ill to write? Madame Zavier tells me that you had been with her son Francis at his father-in-law's near Natchez, where his accident occurred, and advised with his physicians on the day before you came to Les Bocages, and that you met Madame Maurèpas on the boat by accident—coming to visit her mother in consequence of having received information of her brother's injury. That statement would surely suffice, in connection with the illness that prostrated you immediately on your arrival here, during which Madame Maurèpas was of course obliged to remain, as Doctor Durée can testify that you might not be neglected under her mother's roof. Am I empowered by you to make these assertions?"

"I have not seen my cousin since we parted, an hour after our arrival, and in the presence of witnesses, in the drawing-room of Madame Zavier. I owe nothing to her attentions," said my Master Richard dryly, "that I am aware of, unless the occasional ministry of her servant, in the absence of my own, may be considered a proof of care on her part (the little girl Rena, whom you may remember at Maurèpas). Nor had I ought to do with her voluntary exile from a home which had, however, been any thing but a happy one to her for years, though I have ventured so far as to suggest her return to it, and perhaps so offended her; I can not tell. She has surely acted very naturally and with perfect propriety in taking refuge with her mother under these adverse circumstances. Where else could she have gone, Mr La Coste, with the same sense of security?"

"She did not know, then, of her brother's injury when she left home? She meant to abandon Maurèpas?" asked Mr. La Coste, earnestly.

"I made her acquainted on the boat—having joined her for this purpose—with the occurrence, and knowing her nervous frame of mind, delayed details until we arrived at Les Bocages, after which I was too ill to return to Natchez, as I had meant to do almost immediately, and she had been also too much prostrated, I hear, to leave her own chamber. This is all I have to say to M. Maurèpas. I owe him no further explanation."

"I am afraid it will not suffice," said M. La Coste. "I never saw a man so indignant, and he believes you to be all-powerful with your cousin, whether for good or for evil."

"Then I must take the consequences," said my Master Richard. "Fight M. Maurèpas I will not. Nor will any word of his mouth, nor of any man's, brand me as a coward so long as I am not one."

"It will be a street fight, then, Dr. Zavier, and he will have the advantage'}
of you. You know what a practiced shot
M. Maurèpas is."

"I shall defend myself under such
circumstances to the best of my ability," said my Master Richard, calmly; "and if
I perish or if I slay I shall not be to
blame. In either case my conscience
will acquit me. But it is a pity to drag
a wife's good name through the gutters
in that way. Let him think of that."

"Have you shown yourself so care-
ful of that lady's good name, Richard
Zavier, that you should utter such re-
proach?" asked M. La Coste sternly and
with flashing eyes.

"It is not to you that I have to an-
swer that question," said Master Richard
between his set teeth. "If my right arm
were not disabled you should not ask it
with impunity, Jules La Coste. As it is,
I must bear it, I suppose—at least for a
time—but do not presume too far on my
reply to M. Maurèpas in your encoura-
gments, or you may find yourself deceived,
peaceable as you have so far found me."

"I regret to have offended where I
only meant to counsel," said M. La
Coste, mildly. "I did not know until
now that you had met with an injury,
Dr. Zavier. How did you receive it?
Of what does it consist?"

Without noticing either his apology
or inquiry my Master Richard went on,
raising himself on his left arm as he
spoke, as he had not done for days.

"Have you come here to frighten these
women to death with your tragic face
and errand?" he asked, almost fiercely.
"In the name of manhood I hope you
did not betray your mission to Madame
Zavier, nor—" he hesitated.

"Nothing of the sort, Dr. Zavier.
What that lady communicated to me
was voluntary. I only sought to take
advantage of it to mend this unhappy
difference, founded on error and mis-
conception, I doubt not."

Master Richard surveyed him severely.
Just then, watching my opportunity as
Aunt Polly entered to invite M. La Coste
to dinner, I stole away, unobserved by
all but her, and hastened to the chamber
of my mistress, to whom I rendered a
tearful and truthful account of all that I
had overheard. She, too, was roused to
action by the same shock that had
brought my Master Richard back to life.

"Get me my gray silk dress, Rena," she
said. "I will go out to dinner to-day,
or to dessert rather, since they are already
commencing. I have a word to say to
M. La Coste before he goes. Quick,
child! No, never mind my hair. My white
lace point will cover all deficiencies. I
look like myself to-day, for the first time
since I came to Les Bocages. Rena, I
have put on my life-harness again, and
I will wear it from this hour."

"Then we shall go back to Maurè-
pas," I murmured, as I scented her
handkerchief with mille fleurs, "and
we shall all be happy again."

"When the sun and the moon change
places, not before, Rena, as far as I am
concerned; but you can go if you will.
There is M. La Coste, going to pass right
by Claireforte, where he can drop you,
if you choose, with Mr. Roquette. Say,
shall I send you back to your mother?"

"Oh, no! no!" I groaned, shivering
at the thought. "Maurèpas would be
a dungeon to me without you. Mis-
tress, wherever you stay I will stay too,
and be happy."

"You are a good child, Rena," she
said, swallowing hard; then suddenly
she threw her arms about me, and again
she kissed me as she had done when we
first met.

Oh, madam, that kiss sealed our com-
 pact for life. It thrilled me like living
fire. I could have died happily at that
moment, so that I had died for her;
but it was ordered differently—my ser-
vice was not that.

"Give me my fan, Rena," she said, turn-
 ing back at the threshold. "Cool as it
is, I am strangely faint to-day, but I must
see La Coste, and he shall not have the
satisfaction to know that I am miserable,
and to gossip about me all through the
lake neighborhood. I will let him see
how scornfully I have turned my back on
Maurèpas and all connected with it—
how entirely I have cut the Gordian knot."

Then she went forth—with the step
of a queen, and the stave of a song on
her lip, to seek the dining-room.
Very soon I followed her, and took my place, as at home, behind her chair.

Dr. Duroc and Master Bernard Zavier, a boy of ten years old, were at the table, besides my mistress and her mother and M. La Coste, when I went in. Every eye was turned on that beautiful, joyous lady, who sat peeling her bananas and sipping her wine as though she had never known a care, and talking merrily first to one and then the other.

"I hope you are going to make some stay this time at Les Bocages," said Dr. Duroc. "When you were last here, none of the neighbors had the glimpse they coveted of Madame Maurêpas."

"And I," said M. La Coste, gravely, "trust, on the contrary, we shall soon again have the pleasure of seeing Madame Maurêpas at Claireforte, where she is missed by high and low, old and young," and he looked at her suspiciously.

"I shall remain some time with mamma, M. La Coste," said my mistress, carelessly; "she needs me more than ever now that Francis has married a wife and gone to live at Natchez, though I can never hope to replace wholly her dear, painstaking boy. You know he has met with a very sad accident lately."

"Yes, so I have heard. Have you seen your brother since he received his injury, Madame Maurêpas?"

"No; I was too much shocked at first to go to him, and afterward too much indisposed. I learned quite accidentally what had befallen him on my way hither, through Dr. Richard Zavier."

"He spoke of that to-day. By the by, he is very sick himself, it seems. He alluded to some injury to his arm—of what nature is it, Dr. Duroc? You are in attendance, I presume?"

"Yes; it is a sword-thrust—a flesh wound, no more," said Dr. Duroc, shortly, shrugging his shoulders. He was one of those men who never liked to be questioned about his patients, and put aside the shop as much as possible.

"A sword-thrust," repeated Madame Zavier, lifting her eyebrows and locking her hands. "Why, I never heard of that before. I had an idea it was a shoulder-strain merely. How on earth came Richard Zavier with a sword-thrust? I did not know he had an enemy in the world."

"And neither had he, mamma," rejoined my mistress. "It was a stab by mistake, no doubt—not intended for the saintly Richard Zavier."

She spoke with ill-suppressed derision, and M. La Coste looked at her with amazement.

"Aglie," said the mother reprovingly, "our kinsman is no hypocrite. We have proved him long."

"I am sure I have insinuated nothing of the kind, mamma," she answered, lightly. "Richard is all very well in his place—out of it, detestable. Now, it does not suit his style at all to play knight-errant."

"I should think not, indeed," said M. La Coste, laughing low. (He was accounted a man of honor, but, like most old bachelors, spiteful at times.) "I have never thought of Dr. Zavier in the light of a hero; he would make a better preacher, or priest, than any thing else, I imagine."

"Yes, his vocation is evident," rejoined my mistress, smiling. "It is a great pity he missed it. He would scarcely make much figure in romance, though there is no telling! Those meddlesome men try every thing in turn, and are sometimes surprisingly successful."

"Cousin Richard ought to be a soldier," blurted out Bernard. "He ain't afraid of nothing, not even ghosts!"

He had a vague idea that his cousin Richard needed defending at this crisis.

"That is right, Bernard—stand up for your friends," said his mother, looking reproachfully at my mistress, who only laughed and shook her head merrily in return.

"Yes, that is my motto too, mamma," she said, after a while; "but we do not always know our friends. Even the best of them betray us occasionally."

* I have altered many of Rona's expressions, for the sake of euphony and the style of the narrative.—Author.
It is all very incomprehensible to me," remarked Madame Zavier, gravely, looking down.

But, M. La Coste and Dr. Duroc being well-bred men, feigned not to perceive her cause of discontent, and were soon discussing the new opera of Norma with my mistress, which she admired extravagantly.

All this time a cold and deadly sorrow was gnawing at her heartstrings.

After dinner Dr. Duroc went to visit my master Richard, and M. La Coste drew out his watch to see how long a time must elapse before the "Seneca" would come down from the next landing, where we could then hear her blowing off steam.

"She has freight to take on there, I heard," said Madame Zavier, "and may be detained some hours, but it is a chance. However, we are so near the river that she can not fail to observe the signal flying on the woodpile, even if she does not stop to wood with us. So, be at ease, M. La Coste; you shall certainly get off."

"It has been accounted well-bred," said my mistress, "to welcome the coming, speed the parting, guest. But, come into the drawing-room. I have a word to say to you in private before we part, M. La Coste. Mamma, excuse us. I wish to send a message to Maurice. Come with us, Rena; you, too, have some word, no doubt, to send to your mother and to Frederick Tanque."

I entered, trembling. I knew what was coming then. I was to stand up to my testimony.

"You must have thought me very hard on my cousin Richard, M. La Coste, at the dinner table," my mistress began, "but the fact is, I feel provoked with him for bringing himself and me into such a very absurd attitude with regard to M. Maurice. My little servant overheard your conversation with Dr. Zav-ier at his bedside. She was sitting in his room unperceived at the time, not by any direction of mine, but because she preferred to spend her leisure moments in such dutiful attendance. She remembered with gratitude his ever-continued kindness to her at Maurice. In this way I have learned the history of that challenge, and the reply of Dr. Zavier. You must see how both must have annoyed me. Had my cousin interfered less in my affairs, (though for my own good, he fancies,) this dragon of jealousy would never have found a place in the breast of M. Maurice. As it is, my resolution remains unshaken—to return to Clairforce no more. Belle Garde Parish has seen the last of me and I of it. I have been manumitted according to the old established Roman fashion—by a blow; and I disclaim all allegiance toward him who inflicted it—ever a cruel master! Nay, more—I shall seek diligently, from this time, to wash his very existence out of my memory."

"A blow, Madame Maurice—did you say a blow? Did any one witness the outrage?"

"Two equally insignificant personages, no doubt, in the opinion of M. Maurice—this child and the all-seeing Father," she said, with bitter derision, "neither of whom could or would appear against him, as he knew, in a court of earthly justice. But, in heaven, Mr. La Coste, this little slave,—laying her hand firmly on my shoulder,—'will be permitted to testify in my behalf before the King of Kings, himself my chiefest witness!"

Her uplifted, beautiful face, her flashing, tearful eyes, her hand pointed on high, her proud and modest dignity, might have melted toward her a stern heart than that of M. La Coste. He gazed upon her for a time, lost in amazement and admiration, scarce knowing what words to speak.

"Madame," he said, at last, "I came here not alone to serve my boyhood's friend, Leon Maurice, but to endeavor to heal a family breach, most painful in itself, and distressing to many hearts. I have ill succeeded, I fear, but what I can do shall be done—to reconcile husband and wife, friends and relatives, so grievously divided now. In our church, you know, no divorce is possible, and
"I ask, simply, a 'separation des biens,'" M. La Coste, which means nothing, as far as I am concerned, but the right to live apart in peace from my husband.

To M. Maurepas I took no dower, and in all these years he has accumulated nothing; I shall take little away except this child—this slave—that he gave to me long since by a deed that has been recorded. I shall never return to M. Maurepas, never look upon his face again if I can help it; but of this assure him, that if there is one person on this earth I like less than he who was my husband, that man is Richard Zavier. To M. Maurepas I am indifferent, but my cousin I detest!" and the last word came through her set teeth like the hiss of a serpent.

I shrank from the hand that still lingered on my shoulder with a sudden shiver that did not pass unnoticed by my mistress. She grew strangely pale, and motioned me to leave the parlor, but she did not remain long behind me, and Madame Zavier had M. La Coste all to herself on the portico for the hour that intervened before the steamboat came to her landing.

On the very next day my Master Richard left "Les Boccages" without seeking to say adieu to my mistress, and we heard through Mr. La Coste, that the matter had been made up through his intervention between M. Maurepas and Dr. Zavier without further exposure. We seldom saw my Master Richard thereafter. He came only at intervals to pay Madame Zavier some small dividend of an interest he managed for her, and the interviews between the cousins was always reserved and cold, and conducted before witnesses. Madame Zavier attributed this estrangement to the injudicious effort she supposed to have been made by Richard Zavier to reunite man and wife, and accused her daughter of being more implacable than became a Christian toward her cousin.

To such reproaches my mistress made no reply, and afforded no explanation. She became indeed, strangely cold and apathetic after the first excitement caused by my Master Richard's difficulty with M. Maurepas died away; and heard of her husband's ruin, and the approaching sale of his effects, with a stolid indifference that shocked and surprised Madame Zavier, who was herself a very sensitive woman.

For months together I never saw her take her pen, or unclose a book, except her breviary (yet she never went to confessional), nor stick a needle in a bit of embroidery, nor do any of those things that had once so pleasantly filled her time at Maurepas. Joy comes sometimes from small sources to the darkest heart, however.

One day a man and woman came from an upward-bound steamboat, and opened the gate of Madame Zavier's front yard. The man was leading a small gray mare, beautifully caparisoned; the woman bore a harp in her arms which she carried with difficulty, even with the assistance of her companion.

These were Frederick Tanque and my mother, who had been purchased by M. Landry, and were sent now, with his compliments, they told us, with some articles for my mistress, presented by the creditors, because, as was asserted, she had in no way opposed their claims, by setting up a right of dower as she could have done. The first tears my mistress had shed for months were poured on Calypso's neck! There were other articles, beside, on the steamboat for my mistress—her secretary, her book-case and books, some pictures she had loved, especially her large folding Chinese-screen and flower-stand, her marble bath-tub, and toilet-stand, the chairs she had covered with her own embroidery, her music and music-easel, all of which she had left behind; and beside these a case of silver.

She received these things with unaffected delight, and I shall ever believe her life was saved by such means, for a gallop on Calypso, and a few hours at her harp, never failed to revive her when all other means had failed.

Madam, my mistress was ignorant then as I was, of the true reading of
the law. In Louisiana, marriage is a partnership, and there is no *right* of dowery—she only knew a part of her legal rights. Years afterwards Deemaah told me, what he alone knew, that my Master Richard had caused these things to be bought in at sale for my mistress, as if at her own request and expense, and had obtained leave from M. Landry to send them up by her old slaves, as a solace to her feelings.

They remained with us a fortnight by permission. After that I never saw my mother. She died very soon after her return to Maurepas, which M. Landry had bought for his eldest son; and Frederick Tanque perished in rebellion against his master—the sternest slaveholder in all the Belle Garde Parish—fighting in the swamps as I have told you. But in truth, my step-father had been noted always for his overbearing temper, and M. Maurepas was the only man who could ever have governed him, for he was his foster-brother and his master in the true sense of the word—the man he loved with all his faults, even more than he feared him, until estrangement came, for a time, after that cruel punishment of mine.

"What became of your master, Rena?"

"Madam, he led a wicked life in New Orleans, among the gamblers, and managed to get along in some poor way. I never saw him again until his high spirit was broken and his health was gone. Then I befriended him to the best of my poor ability. I was free, then—married to Deemaah, who had his own time from Dr. Richard Xavier, with permission to buy himself whenever he made enough money, which he did before many years. So we were happy together, with our children growing around us, and were glad to serve my master in his misfortunes, as was our duty, seeing that he had no friend nor money left."

"A truly Christian return, Rena, for all the ill-usage you had received at his hands; but, was your mistress content to be wholly dependent on her mother? Did she never regain her energies?"

"Yes, madam, in the course of time; and she obtained an engagement with one of the New Orleans papers—the *Delta*, I think—and wrote an article every week, and drew her money for it, but she no longer signed herself 'Valerie' as she used to do, but simply 'Aglé,' which, indeed, was the name she was best known by, and which seemed most natural to my ears and eyes."

"And did she ever forgive Richard Xavier?"

"Never, madam, as long as she had her will about her. I never heard her speak his name except when she spoke to himself, which she always did politely when he came to see her mother. He took it hard, I think, but he never complained, and was firm as a rock, frozen up though as it seemed, even to his smile."

"And Mr. Adrian—what of him?"

"Oh, she never named his name neither, but I know she thought of him all the same. She wore his picture next her heart, and kept his letters carefully in her little sandal-wood box, and sometimes she looked over them, but on those days, she shut herself up in her room and no one saw her face—not even Bernard the little brother that she loved the most. When we had been about two years with Madame Xavier, Master Jacques was drowned while fishing in Bayou River, and there was great distress in the house, for he was the favorite son of his mother—a bright, noble-looking boy of about fifteen; and with more brains in his head than all the rest of the sons put together—so Master Richard thought; but my mistress loved Bernard best, with his sweet girlish face and tender ways, blue eyes and waving brown hair, so like his mother, while all the rest were Xaviers, my mistress as well—Spanish from the eyes to the heels. I believe it was her nature to love every one of that light complexion, so unlike herself. It was that taste, perhaps, that drew her so strongly to M. Adrian after she saw his likeness, but, as far as I have seen, folks of that sort are cold and cruel-minded."

"Not always, Rena. You have been
unfortunate in your observations, that is all. But tell me, did your mistress receive much society in the house of her mother, or lead the life of a recluse?"

"Neither, madam. She never refused to come into the drawing room to welcome her mother's friends; but if a gentleman called on her alone she refused to see him. Judge Eustis was madly in love with my mistress and she knew it, and he would have moved heaven and earth to get a decree of divorce for her if she would have consented. Even Madame Xavier implored her to let him proceed—Catholic as she was—but my mistress gave always a cold denial, and from the time that he suggested the subject, never spoke to Judge Eustis again. Yet he was a very handsome man, not more than thirty-three, a young widower with one child, and possessed of the finest estate in that parish."

"I suppose he wanted the right coloring, Rena?"

"Yes, madam," she rejoined, gravely, "he was a true Southerner, dark and pale, but with chestnut hair, and steel-gray eyes, very noble-looking we all thought—a man who could put one hand on his saddle and vault on his horse, and guide him like a lamb afterward. His slaves were devoted to him; one word from his mouth was all any of them needed, and he always acted for their good."

"It is truly a pity your mistress could not have fancied him, Rena."

"I loved her the better for it, madam—I did, indeed, this faithfulness of hers."

"But Adrian, at that time, was a mere shadow, Rena, a phantom of her imagination. There could have been no reality about the feeling."

"Oh, madam, she was not like other people; she only needed something to dream about. I doubt sometimes whether she would have been happy as the wife of any man after she found out faults and follies such as all men have; but still, I may be mistaken, and if ever man and woman were made to love each other, it surely was my mistress and Mr. Adrian."

Rena's inconsistency warned me to desist from all further attempt at argument, so I suffered her to proceed in her own way.

There was an interval of trunk-packing, I remember, during which she sighed frequently, as if oppressed by thought, and shook her head from time to time in a sorrowful and absent-minded fashion, that ill comported with her careful folding and placing of my garments. When all was over she settled herself again on a low seat, to continue her narrative, now evidently fast drawing to a close. I knew more of the catastrophe than she supposed, and was more closely interested than she could imagine in tracing, step by step, the events that led to so disastrous a conclusion.

To hear these related by truthful and unsophisticated lips was my chief object in seeking her acquaintance, for her character for uprightness and singleness of purpose had preceded her advent to my lodgings.

Rena was, at the time I write of, a woman of thirty-five years of age, and the mother of grown-up daughters—though she seemed younger for her years than white women usually do, owing to the thick and velvety texture of the quadroon skin, which resists, with its clay-colored opaqueness, the action of sun and storm. She had, too, fine teeth, clear dark eyes, an agreeable smile, small features, and an oval face, entirely sad in repose.

There was about her something of refinement which was rare in one of her class and grade, and her movements were, like those of many of her race, marked with a certain undulating, supple grace that enchained the eye.

She wore the bright-colored head-kerchief and large gold ear-rings common to the mulatto of the south, and though well chosen as to color and effect, her garb was homely as became her condition. The only mark of luxury I observed about her was in the constant use of a fine and speckless linen cambric handkerchief, sometimes slightly lace-trimmed, which she handled as ladies alone usually manage these articles—mere necessities to the well-bred and
luxuries to the vulgar. It was plain to see that Rena had been early accustomed to the accessories of refinement. On her bosom reposed a crucifix of gold, the symbol of her faith, into which, despite her nearly white complexion, a little of the Pagan spirit entered. Her mother, she had informed me, was of Obi origin, or rather ancestry, and the strain of blood was still evidenced in this remote descendant of magicians.

PART VI.

"I had meant to tell you, madam," said Rena, lifting her eyes to mine, after a long interval of silence, "what a consolation my mistress was to her mother after Master Jacques’ death. She seemed to forget her own troubles in the sorrow of Madame Zavier, and their hearts came very near together for the first time since the marriage of my mistress. Before that evil period she had loved her mother very devotedly, far more than her splendid father, whose picture she so closely resembled herself; but a cold shadow had crept between them after she was bartered away, as she always felt it, sold for Les Bocages," she would say sometimes, as if trees and flowers could repay her for the sacrifice of a human soul and the blood and body of the child!

It was not often my mistress spoke so bitterly—only when she was pressed to the wall by M. Maurêpas—for, as I have said, she was happy in her own gifts, before the serpent of the "Green Seal" drugged himself across her pathway. But I had learned from such words how her heart was weaned from her mother, and how she had resented her exile from home and friends.

All this was over now, and she forgave Madame Zavier entirely, and went back to the old confidences and affections she bore her when a little child. They had lived at "Les Bocages" only in the summer time, during the life of M. François Zavier, but she had always loved it, partly, I used to think, because Master Richard was her playmate there.

The death of Master Jacques, so sudden and sorrowful, had softened all her nature, as it seemed to me—unsealed some spring that had been stopped up before; and that inward happiness came back to her, that I told you about, which made her so satisfied at Maurêpas, and she enjoyed every thing with a fresh delight.

She ordered the laying out of a parterre, and selected the flowers, and helped to plant them herself, for Madame Zavier suffered no idle hands about her house, where all was frugality and care, but kept her people, with very few exceptions, employed in her cotton-fields, from whence came all her livelihood. Hers was a small place at best, and it was as much as she could do from its proceeds to sustain her household and educate her sons.

But, she was a famous manager, quiet as she seemed, and provided well for all. No more "Cobbler of Bruss" illuminations now! A pair of wax candles nightly, were all my mistress afforded herself, and these she bought with her own money. The old mistress used myrtle candles of her own making, which were almost as clear as Bougies, and smelled delightfully, but my mistress complained that the odor sickened her and made her faint, and she had her own way.

I remember well, however, how at Maurêpas, she had always burned a myrtle wax night’s taper, out of respect for old usages, and she had a notion then that the smell was healthy, and kept off headache, the only sickness she suffered from in those happy days."

"Happy days, Rena? How can you call those days happy that you have described to me as so bitter and intolerable? I should think you would have been far happier at Madame Zavier’s, away from cruel Maurêpas.”

* The myrtle wax candle is made from the scum of the myrtle-berry, a substance closely resembling paraffine, mingled with the resin of the old field pine. The color is pale green, the texture equal to wax; and, in burning, these candles emit a delicious aromatic odor, which is supposed to be highly conducive to health. Many old aristocratic families use these candles (the making of which is perfect only as an art not easily acquired) in preference to Bougies, as Rena had stated.
"No, madam, no; my happiest days and hers were spent at Maurèpas, in spite of the ill-usage we now and then received. There we had hope, at least, and security from strangers, and we enjoyed our times of peace all the more for the little storms we encountered sometimes. Besides, it was the rightful home of my mistress, and mine; and there is much in that. She was always first at Maurèpas, as she could not and did not wish to be in any other house, even her mother's."

"True, true, Rena; those are considerations; but violence and insult are insufferable."

"She found them so, and gave up all the rest on that account; but I shall ever think my master's money-troubles were maddening him when he struck her, and she did not love him enough to make allowance for them."

"Yet, you say she seemed happy again, Rena, after your Master Jacques' death had softened her nature?"

"Yes, happy, but in a different way—more calm, more quiet, more patient, then at Maurèpas, but not half so bird-like and joyous. She gave more attention to her religious duties than she had done before, and when we were in New Orleans stayed with her old teachers and went to the confessional for the first time in years. It did her good, I think."

"Did she accompany Madame Zavier to the city?"

"No, she went alone, and about her own affairs, and made her home with her aunt, the Abbess Magdalene. When I say alone, I mean without friend or escort. She took me with her, of course. My mistress went down to the city to sell her diamonds (the last gift her father had made her), for her mother's benefit. The year that master Jacques was drowned, the cotton-crop failed at Madame Zavier's place, owing to overflow; and two of her best hands died of fever, and she, the proudest woman you ever saw, scarcely knew where to turn for assistance. So without saying a word to any one about her situation, my mistress took her casket of jewels and went down to see the Jewelers in New Or-leans and sell her diamonds. She carried them all the way in her own satchel, for fear of an accident to the boat, when baggage would be abandoned even if life was saved, and slept with them under her pillow. But we reached our destination safely, and before night my mistress had deposited in bank forty-five hundred dollars to the credit of Madame Maria Zavier, having retained three hundred for her own expenses. The diamonds had cost over five thousand."

"Now Eugene will not be obliged to leave Oakland College," she said, with joy sparkling in her eyes, when we were alone, that evening, in one chamber; "and my mother will not be compelled to ask advances from commission merchants—those cormorants of the earth—or go in debt for supplies for her negroes and household. I never knew what an immense sum forty-five hundred dollars was, before, Rena—the price of a single cashmere shawl! I saw to-day! But, my dear mother has taught me how much comfort may be had for little money when judiciously disposed. I used to be as extravagant as my poor father, and fearfully inexperienced about expenditure."

"Oh, mistress," I ventured to rejoin, "I am sure you never asked for much, and what my master chose to buy for you with his own money you had a right to take and keep. You stayed mostly at home, and never wore such fine clothes or drove so fine a carriage as the rest of the lake ladies."

"That is true," she said, clasping her hands in that solemn, childish way she had; "but, remember those illuminations! Many a poor mother would be thankful for an inch of candle to see her child's dying face by, and I flared out dozens every night—at Maurèpas, with open windows and the wind blowing across the room. It is a matter of serious self-reproach to me."

I could scarcely keep from smiling as she said these words, but I managed to be grave, for; just then, the holy bishop knocked at the door, coming to talk with her an hour before administering the sacrament which she was to take
the next day at the cathedral. I sat very quietly in one corner while he remained, and felt greatly consoled myself by his pious advice and conversation. Not once was the name of M. Maurepas mentioned by either one.

On our way to the cathedral, the next morning, we met M. Maurepas, face to face. I never knew before what metal my mistress was made of. She passed him with her veil up, without moving a muscle of her face, or changing color in the least; but he reeled from one side of the pavement to the other, and staggered like a drunken man, turning red and pale in quick succession, and at last leaning against the wall of the cathedral for support. I saw him there as we went up the steps, but my mistress never seemed to have noticed him at all; and but for a remark of mine later, I might have believed that she had not seen him as she passed.

"My master had a very distressed look," I said, when I was undressing her that evening; "did you not think so, mistress?"

"Have you a master any longer, Rena? I thought you had only a mistress now."

"M. Maurepas, I mean—your husband, my own dear mistress, that we met on Jackson square to-day, as we went up to the cathedral." I could not forbear bursting into tears, for, with all his faults, I pitied him from the bottom of my heart. Not so my mistress.

"He has cause to be thankful to God," she said, in a hard, cold voice, "that he is permitted to expiate his ill-conduct in this world rather than the next; else, everlasting hell-fire might be his portion. That man is nothing to me, Rena; never mention him again in my presence;" and she went on reading the book the bishop had sent her, as calmly as though we had not spoken of M. Maurepas.

Then I knew that what she had said was the bare truth, and no boastful fancy, madam. I knew that my master was dead to her for ever, and that she had indeed "wiped him out of the tablets of her heart." Those were her words, I remember. She always said things different from other people. One thing I learned, however: that, from that day, my mistress always wore that small, sharp poniard she had carried so much at Maurepas, but laid aside of late.

"I will be prepared for him," she murmured, "if ever he lays his hand on me again, either in wrath or kindness. One would fare as ill with him as the other"—and that old look flashed in her eyes once more.

When we went back to Les Bocages, my mistress told her mother what her errand had been in New Orleans, and Madame Zavier was greatly touched and comforted at this proof of pious consideration.

They were very happy together, madam, for a season; and every one in and about the house was devoted to my mistress, and, through her, to me; but somehow my heart was mostly sad at Les Bocages. I felt from the first as my mistress said she always did before a thunder-storm—as if something was coming to crush me—and every new sound, or sudden arrival, made me tremble.

My greatest joy was on those rare occasions when my master Richard and Deemah would come for a few days. It was like the sunshine breaking through cold, gray clouds to me, to see those friendly faces—one so noble and beautiful, the other so honest and affectionate.

It was in this way I got accustomed to and finally attached to Deemah, though I never knew what it was to love him, or any one—" She hesitated, then added, in low tones, as if of soliloquy: " Who could or would stoop to love me again?"

For a moment her face was clouded and downcast; then, rousing herself as from reverie, she proceeded with renewed energy.

I think I have brought you pretty well up to the time, madam, when the steamer Geraldine exploded opposite to the plantation of Madame Zavier. It was a perfect wreck; half of the passengers were killed, and the rest more or less fearfully injured. There were boats employed for many hours in
rescuing sufferers from the water. Some of these were brought to our landing, and, as the house of Madame Zavier was not large, she had her cotton-gin hastily fitted up as a hospital. It was April, and most of the cotton had been hulled and sent off, so there was ample accommodation for all. She herself, her women and Dr. Durac, moved among them constantly, dressing their wounds and ministering to their wants for several days.

My mistress would have gone also to help care for them, had not an object that required all her attention detained her at home. Just as she had opened the gate to go down to the cotton-gin, a man staggered in, with singed hair and a blackened face, holding up two terribly scalped hands before her, and imploring her to suffer him to go to her house and receive immediate attention. She did not hesitate, but taking him by one arm, motioned to me to support him by the other, and thus we led him, groaning at every step, back through the garden walks we had just traversed, and so up the long steps of the portico and into the ell room, in which gentlemen were always lodged. Aunt Polly was called, and his wounds were dressed with linseed oil and flour, and he was placed in bed, which trembled under him as the pain shook his frame. I never saw any one suffer as he did; but he was so soon asleep under a strong opiate, and awoke refreshed. From that time he began steadily to improve.

His face was quite uninjured, as we found after washing away the soot that almost covered it, but his hair was burnt off quite close to his head. His very eyebrows had been scorched. His hands healed rapidly under our simple treatment, and a fortnight from the time of his arrival, Mr. Marstyn was able to show his white teeth, and laugh and talk with my mistress and Madame Zavier. His golden-brown curls were commencing to twist themselves again, and his eyebrows looked quite natural. We saw that he was a very handsome gentleman, young and gallant-mannered, and full of life.

But, for all, I used to wonder what it was my mistress saw in him to make her cling so to his pillow, and study his face so earnestly, even when he lay fast asleep, or why she hung on every word he spoke, talking but little herself, yet full all the while of a sort of fluttering anxiety that made her color go and come like a flame, and her eyes as bright as stars.

But, one day, I saw her when he had dropped to sleep (for he was still weak, and would doze off suddenly, even while others were speaking or reading to him), draw from her bosom the miniature of Mr. Adrian, and, glancing rapidly for a time from one to the other, put it up at last very suddenly, when he roused from slumber, yet with a satisfied smile.

Madam, I knew from that hour, as well as she did, what thought had entered her mind, but I never breathed it to a soul. I had determined, long before, never again to come between my mistress and her happiness, whatever that might be, and, even if master Richard had questioned me himself, I am sure I should have kept my resolution. But he did not come, just then, and I had no temptation to speak to any one but her.

"Mistress," I said one night, not long after this observation, "I wonder when Mr. Marstyn is going away? It seems to me he stays a long time for such a stranger. I thought he was going to Mexico to join the army?"

"Wonder on," she said, without raising her eyes from her breviary, "but take heed how you talk. Above all, ask me no questions, Rena. I will not suffer it." Then she smiled, well pleased I saw, although her words were stern.

"I wish he would go," I continued, nothing daunted, "before master Richard comes. I am so afraid that my vision will come true then—my vision of blood and steel."

"Little witch! you are a clairvoyant I believe," she said, glancing up, quickly, with a suppressed smile upon her lips. "Now, Rena, tell me true, what is it you suspect?" shutting her book, suddenly.

"Oh, mistress," I said, dropping the
comb I held, and clasping my hands as I fell on my knees before her. “Remember what dear master Richard said about your ‘evil genius’—I mind his very words—and be done with the ‘Green Seal’ serpent for ever! Don’t let Mr. Marstyn know that you are ‘Valerie.’”

“What a demure duenna I have in you, Rena,” she said, laughing merrily; “and what makes you suppose Mr. Marstyn would care to know? Strangely enough, however, I had come to the same resolution myself; so now, get up from your sacrificial position—or is it penitential? and resume your comb, and don’t tangle my hair in your bewilderment, nor pull it from sheer spite, as you sometimes do; and, mark me, Rena, let your own lips be sealed as closely as those letters were that used to come to me at Maurépas, with their serpent sigants—those precious letters, every word of which is written here, and here.”

And she laid her hand upon her heart and head.

“Will you be divorced now, mistress?” I asked, peeping round into the after the silence of a few moments. “You can, if you like, Mr. Eustis said, you know,” and I simpered outright.

“Are you crazy, Rena? or, do you wish to make me so? Little pest! if you hazard another remark, either to me or others, I’ll send you to live with Mrs. Francis Zavier, at Natchez, and make you nurse her little cross, teething baby. There! I hope you will learn discretion from that threat. One more dire could hardly be conceived.”

“And what would you do without me, mistress?” I questioned, saucily. You see how she had spoiled me, madam! She answered me with a clear, ringing peal of laughter, such as I had not heard burst from her lips since we had left Maurépas.

“What, indeed?” she asked, sadly, the next minute; and she wiped tears from her eyes that might have flown from mirth. Then there was silence for a while.

“Rena,” she said, suddenly turning upon me gravely, “it is just possible that God has yet great stores of happiness reserved for me. I have discovered that Marstyn loves me and I love him. He is a widower; I know from what he told my mother. When she asked him whether she should write to his friends concerning his condition, he replied that he had none near enough to care for him, except two or three little children too young to understand matters—so I know that his wife is dead. It is probable that before many months I, too, shall stand free in the sight of man as I now am in the sight of God; and then—we shall see, Rena, we shall see. ‘Oui, je veux.’ In the meantime, he is unacquainted with my real name. They call me Madame Aglaé, you know, at my own request, and I know that my mother has waived his inquiries. He would not stoop, of course, to question servants, even if he had an opportunity. My black dress has satisfied him of my widowhood, and I told him that I was poor. Under these circumstances, it remains to be seen what he will do. He has not yet asked me to be his wife, but I think—I think—he will before many days are over. Then he will leave ‘Les Bocages’ for a season, Rena, but not to go to Mexico. Oh, no! I have convinced him what an iniquitous war it is—of aggression and intrusion, and he has promised me to resign his commission in the army. But all this is a profound secret, so far, Rena, and you are not to tell even Aunt Molly.”

Then I promised her, kneeling down before her crucifix, to be silent as the grave, and I tried to rejoice with my mistress. But my heart misgave me. I know not how or why, but I trembled from the first.

“As to Richard Zavier,” she said, when her toilet was completed, and beautiful she looked that day in her white India dress and lace scarf, and the oleander blooms in her hair, with the deep flush on her cheek that made her splendid always when it came. “As to Richard Zavier, should he dare to interfere again with my arrangements, whatever they may be, I will slay him with my own hand.”

And she clenched the jeweled handle of that poniard, speaking through her
clenched teeth, while her eyes blazed, and
grew like stars about to shoot.

"Oh, don't, mistress!" I cried, clasping
my hands before my eyes, and
shrieking feebly; "don't make such
threats against dear master Richard!"

"Then let him beware!" she said,
grimly; and so, she passed from her
chamber to enter that of the man who
was her fate.

"Fate, Rena? How can you sup-
pose there was anything in an accidental
meeting like theirs? They had already
proved their fate as far as that went—
and should have been content to let
chance alone."

"No, madam, it was fate from first
to last; and now that all was quiet and
likely to remain so, the river throws him
from its breast, you see, down at the
feet of the woman he had sworn to ren-
nounce. How could he help himself if
he loved her, not even knowing that she
was his 'Valerie'? and who can blame
her if she loved him, knowing full well
that he was her own 'M. Adrian'? I,
for one, madam, believe their fate was
fixed, and there is nothing left but to
pity them."

And she sat for a while like some
prophetess carved in yellow sand-
stone.

"She loved him," she began, shaking
her solemn head, "as she could never
have loved anyone else—as God meant
she should love him alone, and he wor-
sipped her. Yet, he never asked her
to be his wife until the very day before
that he had fixed upon his departure.
He was quite restored now; he had the
perfect use of his hands, and was vigor-
ous and joyous as a child just let loose
for a holiday. His face was a very
beautiful one, I thought, with clear-cut
features and a broad white forehead,
over which short, thick curls clustered,
of golden brown; and large, brilliant
blue eyes, like a frosty sky in winter;
and a smile as sudden and bright as a
burst of sunshine at first, but cruel when
it lingered. You recollect that smile,
madam, for, of course you knew from
the beginning when I mentioned his
true name, who Mr. Marstyn was."

"Oh, yes, Rena, that was the only
name I ever knew him by."

My carelessness disarmed her and she
went on. "She loved him," she re-
peated, "and he worshiped the ground
she walked on. I know the true signs
of true love, even if it never came to
me; and I knew that, in his way, Mr.
Marstyn loved my mistress as well as
ever Master Richard did in his; but
their natures were different. His ways
were far more winning, and he made
more outward sign of feeling than my
master Richard ever could have done,
even if he had been a lover instead of a
dear brother."

It was beautiful to see how jealously
the quadroon guarded her master Rich-
ard's secret—with what reverence she
regarded him and his honor.

"So it went on, as I have said, until
the last day of his tarrying at Les Boc-
cages. Then he spoke out, free and full, and
asked the consent of Madame Zavier to
his courtship.

"Has Agathe consented to marry you,
Mr. Marstyn?" asked her mother, with
amazement, "that you appeal to me? She
is her own mistress, you know—in
one way being a wife separated from
her husband by act of law; but there
has been no divorce—and Monsieur—"

"Never name that name, mother, if
you love me," said my mistress, clasping
her hands wildly above the lips of
Madame Zavier. "It is sufficiently ex-
plained. You have promised me never
to call that fatal name again in any
connection with me. Oh, mother dear"
—falling upon her neck—"you shall
have all my reasons later. I shall tell
Mr. Marstyn every thing, too, when the
right time comes. Help me to preserve
my little mystery now."

"And do I understand," he asked
gently, "that you are not a widow by
death, but only by inclination? Ah! so
much the better! There will be no
regrets to struggle against. But, you
say, Madame Zavier, this divorce can be
readily obtained. Why then has it been
defferred so long?"

She then explained to him the op-
position of the church, and her daughter's determination hitherto to submit to its decrees.

"But that is all over, dear mother," said my mistress, eagerly. "The church—all else fades into nothingness compared to him," and she extended her hand to Mr. Marstyn, who, seizing it, covered it with kisses.

"All demonstration like this must be deferred for a time," said my mistress, withdrawing her hand and blushing vividly. "I forgot that I am not yet free. Go, and when you return I will receive you as my heart dictates."

"But, Aglāe, my child," Madame Zavier remonstrated, "this gentleman is but a stranger to us. What can you know of him? How is it possible this love can have sprung up so speedily between you?"

"Mother, mother, how long did it take you to learn to love my father," asked my mistress, archly. She well knew the history of the brief courtship and devoted affection of her parents.

Still, Madame Zavier seemed sad and uncertain. As she turned to leave the parlor, Mr. Marstyn said to her:

"Madame Zavier, it is only natural you should feel as you do about this matter. You have, I know, your house engagements now, but come when you are at leisure. I will defer until then a confession I was about to make to your daughter alone. It is one due to you both, and involves the only mystery of my life, but it places us on equal ground at least. When that is cleared up all will be serene and open between us three. For the rest, believe me, I have not wooed your daughter without the ability to sustain and support her as becomes her gentle breeding. My fortune is no contemplible one, Madame Zavier, let me assure you."

"There are many things beyond fortune, I have learned to think," she said, turning at the door. "Nevertheless, I confess I am pleased to hear that your means are sufficient. I will return this afternoon, as you propose, to penetrate your mystery. We shall dine in the interval, and Dr. Duroc is expected to join us with his wife; so it may be best to defer our family conference until after their departure."

So saying, she departed, cold and mournful. She had never liked Mr. Marstyn, I saw from the beginning; but this you know is often the case between two people of that color. It had not surprised me.

"What a physiologist you would make, Rena!"

"I don't know, madam, what that long word means—nothing evil I hope. I only know what my eyes and ears tell me. They never deceive, you know, when you are only a looker-on and a hearer. It is different, of course, when you come to feel."

"To be an actor, in short, Rena."

"I thought actors only spoke the words they read out of the play-books," she said with a literal simplicity that broke out singularly ever and anon, beyond all the usages of her outer life. It was the wisdom of her inner life.

Explanation or discussion were alike useless if not impossible here; so I suffered her to pursue the thread of her story, without further interruptions.

My mistress passed the morning in the drawing-room with Mr. Marstyn and other company, and when Dr. Duroc and his wife had returned home, after the three o'clock dinner, that Madame Zavier always gave her family, the long April afternoon was drawing to a close.

It was then that my mistress went with her mother to the morning parlor, where they sat usually when alone—a small room opening to the veranda, lined with books, though they never called it a library—to join Mr. Marstyn, and hear from him the confession he had promised them to make in the morning. I was called to bring iced water, and remained, sitting on a low stool in the corner, without attracting observation. It was my habit to do this with the approval of my mistress whenever I so desired. On a sofa, so placed that one end was in shadow, sat Mr. Marstyn and Madame Aglāe; Madame Zavier occupied a fauteuil at a little distance, somewhat
behind Mr. Marstyn, I remember, so that my mistress could see her face across her shoulder and his also, though her own was only to them a dark outline. They faced the windows, through which the setting sun was streaming; but her back was turned to these, so as to screen her effectually from scrutiny.*

Thus every change on Madame Zaviers countenance was observed by my mistress, and these, oh, madam! never have I seen grief, scorn, terror so vividly portrayed as on that lady's face while Mr. Marstyn made his confession, or rather narrated his experience; but he could see nothing of this, of course, either on one countenance or the other, from the way in which he was sitting.

And so he went on, nothing dreaming, nothing suspecting, to the awful end—the end of all to him; but you know all that, perhaps, better than I can tell you.

"No, no, Rena, proceed, I know only the catastrophie. I ask for more. I would be just, even if I cannot be generous."

The carelessness of my tone and manner had their effect. Indeed, the time was over when passion could have been awakened by this recital; but I earnestly desired to know facts which as yet I had not been able, beyond a few very apparent ones, to clearly ascertain.

I desired to know what steps had led to a tragedy that had, at one time, exerted a very disastrous influence on me, but which I had learned to believe had in the end infinitely improved the purpose of my destiny.

"Go on, Rena," I said, "let me hear what Mr. Marstyn had to say for himself on this occasion; he must have been very ingenious to be able to set up any defense against his past ill conduct—that is, if he frankly acknowledged every thing."

"Madam, you shall hear all of what Mr. Marstyn told my mistress; I can never forget one word of that recital. You see it was printed on my brain with fire, as people make likenesses now, with only the sun to help them—stamped in a moment, but like to last a lifetime."

"Photographed, Rena. I understand you; the simile is good. I have received electric impressions, myself, in the same way sometimes, yet with every detail perfect."

"My mystery is simply this," said Mr. Marstyn. "Yet it is strangely coincident with that of Madame Aglie, whose second name I shall demand presently, in return for my own confidence. I, too, am a widower with a living wife. I, too, am entitled to a divorce, I am assured by my attorneys, which the courts are ready to grant me at any moment on the plea of cruel desertion. Three years ago my wife left my bed and board without sufficient reason, and withdrew her children from my roof. I returned from a journey to find my home desolate, my family flown! Remonstrance, explanation, were of no avail. My wife obstinately refused to hear me or to return to me, having found shelter in her father's house in a neighboring State. Yet she claims no divorce herself, and is content to wear her marriage yoke to the grave, and let me go free."

"That is because she still loves you, Mr. Marstyn," said my mistress, eagerly. "Your wife is a true woman, no doubt; but what was your offending?"

"No, it is herself she loves, not me," said Mr. Marstyn. "She worships expediency and propriety, and ignores her husband's claims; but I can not aver, truthfully, that I have ever loved her, or craved greatly her affection. So that there is even less excuse for this behavior on her part from the causes she alleges, than if warmer relations had existed. A few letters, a few half-founded reports, were enough to shake the foundations of her conjugal fidelity—matters which a true wife would have sifted thoroughly before believing, and even if substantiated would have, after a season, forgiven lovingly."

"Will you be good enough to relate
to us the circumstances?" asked Madame Zavier, in her cold and quiet way. "You will not forget, I hope, Mr. Marstyn, that it is my daughter's welfare that is at stake, and which inspires this curiosity of interest, so to speak. It is little my habit to ask questions."

"Oh, surely not," he answered, smiling. "It was, indeed, in consideration of such rights on your part, Madame Zavier, that I resolved to include you as part of my audience this evening; otherwise I should have confided my confession to the ear of Madame Aglaë alone."

"Perhaps this would still be best," I heard my mistress murmur; but, if he heard her he took no heed, but still pursued his story. I, who sat near her, could hear her small foot beating upon the mat, and her breath coming and going fast—her usual symptoms of impatience or dissatisfaction.

"I shall not seek to justify my conduct wholly," said Mr. Marstyn; "to do this would be disingenuous; but I deny that in the matter which gave my wife umbrage, there ever entered one thought or one feeling that could have offended the sternest moralist. I was merely what the French call 'inconsequent' in my conduct of this affair; you comprehend, of course, the meaning of that harmless word."

"Oh, perfectly," said my mistress, sharply. "It is a very expressive one. But, do not linger on your way, I beg, or perhaps we had better forego the confessions utterly, and take every thing for granted. I, for one, am entirely willing to do this."

"But I am not so minded, Aglaë," said her mother. "Proceed, Mr. Marstyn, I beg, and constitute me your judge on this occasion, since my daughter refuses that office."

"Both judge and jury, madam, if you please; and I am sure you will acquit me," said Mr. Marstyn, frankly, "of any criminality of act or intention either against my wife or another. Still, I deem it right to unburden my mind before you both, under present circumstances. I desire that the woman I love—the only woman I have ever loved, so help me God—should read me truly before she plights me her hand. As I have said, I plead guilty to levity and gai-lantry, on the surface—nothing deeper. I call this little episode in my life the 'Romance of the Green Seal.' As I proceed in my narrative, you will understand the source of this title, and perhaps smile at its absurdity. No matter, it will answer for a magazine article some day."

I could hear my mistress breathing hard between her set teeth as he made this remark.

"It was in the spring of 184—," pursued Mr. Marstyn, "that I was attracted by some lines in a Boston paper, to which sheet I was a frequent contributor, called 'My Ideal,' and signed 'Valerie.' On inquiry of the editor, I found that this very flimsy and fanciful production proceeded from a Southern correspondent, a lady who dated her letters 'Bellegarde parish,' Louisiana, and who was addressed in return by her 'nom de plume' simply, to the care of the 'postmaster at Claireforte.'

"Following an impulse that I can scarcely account for or justify, the whim of an idler, seeking to amuse himself, I wrote a high-flown and fantastic letter to Valerie, and found the oracle mute, as might have been expected."

"Valerie?" murmured Madame Zavier, softly; "are you sure that was the name, Mr. Marstyn?"

"Quite sure," replied Mr. Marstyn. "I then repeated the dose, and strengthened it somewhat with a tincture of personality, having laid a wager with my chum, young Fontaine, that I would procure an answer; and sure enough, it came this time, and I assure you that we had good fun out of it! It was the most verdict thing! Yet, there was something so fresh and piquant in the style—so Robinson-Crusoe-ish, in short, if you can manage to feminize the idea—that I was fain to drink once more of this fount of living waters, and so wrote again, and again, with the same result.

* It need not be said that the name here assigned to this parish is fictitious.
"I began about this time to entreat for a real name, and for a meeting—both of which were refused, with a determination that surprised me, emanating from such a source, for the woman was both weak and credulous it was evident, or the correspondence would never have existed at all. I then wrote to the postmaster at Claireforte, making inquiries as to the real name and station of 'Valerie,' and received from him a most insulting letter, signed 'Richard Maurice,' (you have more to hear of the man presently,) which, of course, I never noticed, but which gave me none of the demanded information. I contended myself, thereafter, with the idea that I should receive voluntarily, some day, what seemed so difficult to obtain at that period, and you will see that I was not far wrong in this conjecture. By the by, in the ardor of my anxiety, I was foolish enough to send my own picture about this time, which I should be glad to have back again just now, to place in another's hands. It was an exquisite miniature—the work of the painter Inman."

"A good likeness, no doubt," said my mistress, more calmly than I speak to you now, with her eyes fixed on her mother's face. I, seated by her side in the shadow, could see her features as the others could not, and they were locked and small—a fatal sign ever with her.

"Oh, capital!" responded Mr. Marsyn, gaily; "a little flattered, perhaps, as miniatures are apt to be, because of the delicacy of the handling; but I shall never get through at this rate, and I think by signs and tokens Madame Zavier is growing impatient. Do I bore you, madam?"

"Not at all, not at all," said Madame Zavier, in a husky voice. "Let me hear everything."

"Well, everything shall you hear; for, unless I assign the reasons of my wife's behavior, you may think matters worse than they were; and it seems necessary, in order to establish the truth of my position, that I should go into a few wearying details—wearying to me, as well as yourselves, for, sooth to say, it is a subject I dislike to revert to. One almost learns to hate a woman, even if not designing, who manages to throw one into such a mortifying predicament as this in which 'Valerie' placed me. It is almost incredible that any sane woman, even if a recluse on a Southern plantation, as she assured me she was, living with a husband she could not love, and with no society beyond her slaves, should play the fool so very decidedly as did this poor Valerie, (or Mrs. Mowbray, as I have had some reason to believe she was called,) I told you that I bided my time to find out her little reservations; but, instead of these alone, the matter promised much more. A grand dénouement, conducted on the principles known to the melodrama and French romancers alone, awaited me. The mysteries were still preserved for a more momentous revelation.

"After two years of close correspondence, I received the pleasing intelligence that 'Valerie' herself proposed to pay me a visit, and to devote the remainder of her life to literature, and to your unworthy servant—that is, after her divorce should be obtained. She seemed to take it for granted that I was as free as that chartered libertine, the air, and ignored, altogether, the possibility of ties similar to her own, in my case."

A deep groan escaped the lips of Madame Zavier, and she held up her hands appealingly to my mistress, (who never stirred,) and her lips moved without a sound, almost convulsively.

"Go on, Mr. Marsyn," said my mistress, in a hard, dry voice. "You are losing time."

"Ah, I see how it is, ladies," he remarked, meekly casting his eyes down upon the floor; "you both condemn my course, forgetting that, in faulty man, frivolity is not the crime it is in perfect woman. Frankly speaking, Madame Aglaé, as far as I have gone, which of us two do you condemn most? Now tell me truly."

"Oh, Valerie, of course," replied my mistress, with wonderful firmness. "I think she was the most deplorable fool I ever heard of in my life."
'I knew that you would think so, with your lofty views of female reticence and virtue; but, it is charitable to suppose that folly alone was at the bottom of this escapade of hers. The truth is, she had heard that I was a man of fortune; her husband was ruined; self-interest impelled her to her course, I can not doubt.'

'She was doubtless very mercenary,' said my mistress. 'Not a word, mother,' holding up her hands. 'Let Mr. Marstyn go on to the end. I want you to hear every thing as it occurred. If you interrupt him now, he will never resume his relation, I am confident. Remember, I, too, have some curiosity to hear the whole proceeding. What more of Valerie, then, Mr. Marstyn?'

'Did you know this Mrs. Mowbray?' asked Mr. Marstyn, suddenly, of my mistress. 'She was probably obscure, and lived, I know, at a distance from this region; yet it strikes me you may have heard of her, from the way you speak.'

'Never in my life, or any one bearing that name,' said my mistress, pointedly; 'nor has my mother. She has old-fashioned prejudices, however, to overcome, you will find, but in me you have a most disinterested and dispassionate hearer.'

'So I perceive,' said the man, stupidly. 'Oh, madam, had he known my mistress as I knew her, he would have fled from her presence for ever, the moment her voice assumed that dry and grating sound. Had I dared, had I dared, I would have warned him to proceed no further; but it would have been like passing a tiger's cage when the door was open, to do such a thing just then; and this I knew. So I sat quietly, but with a quaking heart and trembling knees. I felt like a wretch who is being pushed to the edge of a precipice.'

'It seems very strange that Valerie should have determined on such a step without any encouragement from you,' said my mistress, dryly. 'Did you never invite her to join you in Boston?'

'Oh yes, in a certain way—one that she should have perfectly understood, as 'signifying nothing.' As to any idea that such a thing could ever come to pass, I entertained it no more than the belief that I am now standing on the brink of my grave. Had a bomb-shell exploded on my roof, it could not have shocked me more than the letter which reached me, with its peculiar seal of gold-spotted wax, (my seals were always green, I forgot to say, which originated the title of my little romance,) one fine morning in October. I lost no time, when I had regained my composure, in answering this very practical epistle, and, as the French say, going 'en avant' of the approaching guest. I could imagine my wife's consternation when Valerie—withered and passe, I have no doubt, (for beautiful women never need do such hair-brained things,) should come driving up, bag and baggage, to our house in Portland place, entreating for shelter, and making a grand scene when the truth should be discovered. I determined to forestall all this, as it was my duty to do, as well as inclination, for I have an English horror of scenes. So I wrote to Valerie that I would join her at Memphis, seeing that reason was out of the question at such a distance, with a woman in her frame of mind.'

'And she joined you there?' groaned Madame Xavier, covering her face with her hands.

'Not so fast, my dear madam; and here comes in our gallant postmaster again, who, it seems, as luck would have it, was either her brother or lover, I never knew which. Instead of my Valerie, came Mr. Richard Maurice, with pistols for two, which I, having the choice of arms, converted to swords, and the end of it was, we fought, and were both wounded, neither of us mortally, however'—laughing and shrugging his shoulders; 'and I was saved the painful necessity of sending Valerie home with a flea in her ear, to use a vulgar saying, most appropriate to this occasion, however, by this meddlesome Southerner, who, it seems, had intercepted her letters at his post-office, and placed her securely in the custody of a jealous husband,
before hastening to receive me in this hospitable fashion."

"I understand it all now," groaned Madame Zavier. "No need for another word, Aglaë—"

"Go on, Mr. Marstyn," said my mistress, sternly. "What more of Valerie? I told you my mother would scarcely know how to allow for aught that exceeds her own experiences. She is very old-fashioned, truly; but, she must contain herself to the close. It will soon be here."

I heard my mistress draw in her breath hard through her shut teeth, which she ground audibly. I put out my hand and touched hers, which lay clenched upon her knee. It was cold as ice; but she did not seem to feel or regard my touch, so I withdrew my fingers, and waited for the end.

"I have told you clearly, truly, frankly, all that I know of Valerie, dear Madame Aglaë. I never saw her, never heard of her more—have seldom since wasted a thought on her, save in connection with my domestic misfortunes. Some letters of hers lying loosely in my desk—the last I had received among them, (Fontaine and I had been looking through them over together the day I took my departure for Memphis, and being hurried myself, I relied on him to bundle them up again—which the careless fellow neglected to do,) these met my wife's eye, and filled her with jealous rage, a jealousy that had not the excuse of love. Fortunately I had kept no copies of my own letters, nor were these very clearly alluded to by Valerie, who, truth to tell, poor creature, seemed mostly in the clouds. My wife followed me as far as Louisville, I understood, heard all she cared to know, never prosecuting her inquiries far enough to be certain of either my guilt or my innocence, then, turning on her heel, though she knew that I was lying wounded at Memphis, went back to Boston to gather up her children and effects and take refuge in her father's house in Rhode Island, before I should return.

"After sundry ineffectual efforts to gain a hearing, and induce her to return to my house, I abandoned the whole matter as a bad job, and reconciled myself to the idea of a single life. In the mean time, after the lapse of two years, and in accordance with the laws of our State, which make this period of abandonment a cause for divorce, I put in a bill of this description, which only wants the signature of a judge to be effectual. It has been already granted in other quarters, and approved upon every known principle, no objection having been offered by my wife.

"I have laid before you, my dear ladies, the only error of my married life, and wait your verdict of honorable acquittal," said Mr. Marstyn, in conclusion.

"The letters of Valerie, did you ever return them?" asked Madame Zavier, suddenly, raising her face from the handkerchief in which she had buried it, then dropping it again, unseen by him.

"No, madam, I never did—my wife having taken possession thereof, 'vi et armis,' but, I do assure you, 'Valerie' was not a person to care what became of them—a woman so lost to propriety as to entertain such a correspondence at all would scarcely be annoyed at consequences."

"Were those letters wanting in womanhood, in modesty, that you denounce her thus?" demanded my mistress, coldly. "I really have some curiosity to know)—hesitating, and breathing hard —'what you thought of those productions."

"Thought of them? I can scarcely tell you. They were flimsy and fanciful rather than passionate or impure effusions. I can not recall any very censurable expressions or sentiment, yet, the whole impression was unfavorable to the writer. She must have been either the most virtuous or the most designing of women. But, why dwell farther on this matter, dear Madame Aglaë?" and he strove to take her hand, which effort she resisted. "I had hoped to be exonerated, in your eyes, at least, from all very censurable conduct, as far as my wife was concerned. The rest can be but of little moment,
as far as you are to be considered. I would not have you think, however, that I had been a hard or reckless husband, and for this reason alone I have unbounded myself."

He spoke in a grieved tone.

"You have done well," said my mistress, rising, "and taught me in turn a lesson of sincerity."

"Oh, Aglae, is it all true, then?" groaned Madame Zavier, advancing toward her daughter. "I had hoped you were about to deny it—every word, every word! This, then, was why your cousin Richard went to Memphis and received a sword-thrust, and you have deceived every one of us but him! Oh, harder than all that has gone before—harder than widowhood, poverty, the loss of children, your own misfortunes, is this disgrace to bear. Daughter, you have broken my heart!"

"My God, madam, what have I done?" said Mr. Marstyn, springing to his feet, and stretching his hands, first to one then the other. "Can it be possible, that, after all—'Valerie,' or Mrs. Mowbray, is, indeed—"

"Madame Mauřezap," interrupted my mistress, sternly, adding after a long and to me dreadful pause, in low tones: "Cousin Richard, you are avenged! Husband, I go to join you in the lowest depths. This man has slain my soul! Mother, strengthen me now, and do not abandon me," and she extended her hands, like a child groping in the darkness, to Madame Zavier, who, cold and Impassive, stood apart, the image of grief, and anger, and mortification.

"Then, Lucifer, have it your own way, since God forsakes me," cried my mistress, and she turned with a fierce, impetuous gesture toward Mr. Marstyn, who stood like one confounded.

"Man, evil genius, Adrian Marstyn, fate, whatever you may be, or call yourself, we must part, and that eternally; but first," whispering horribly, "draw near, that I may give you this parting message from 'Valerie.' You will find it sweet!"

He came to her—the fond, infatuated mortal—as you may see a dizzy moth headlong approach a candle. Obeying an impulse of terror, I threw myself between them, but too late to ward or save. The glittering steel, plunged with a rapid hand from its sheath, had flashed in the last gleam of sunset, and gone home to the heart of Mr. Adrian before I could interpose, and, in another moment he had fallen dead at her feet. My shrieks filled the room. Madame Zavier, too late, had recovered from her stony stupor. My mistress stood like a statue, smiling down upon her victim as she lay.

You see, madam, my vision had come to pass!

It was a merciful interposition of Providence that, ten minutes later, my master Richard entered the parlor, having just left the steamer "Monrose" at the wood-landing. I heard it puffing up steam again just before our dire tragedy, so there was no one to follow or interfere. But for his timely presence we might all have been mad before morning. As it was, there was only one (but that you know already, perhaps)—my mistress! She never drew a single breath after that hour, until the day she died, nearly two years later.

"God mercifully shielded her, Rena. Truly, her provocation was great."

"Yes, madam, in all her madness she never named Mr. Adrian or Mauřezap. She was a little child again, at 'Les Boccares,' playing with master Richard, and calling him Mr. Maurice as she did, aunt Polly told me, when they were small, and making believe to visit one another, like grown-up people. That was his middle name, madam—his mother's name. She was of pure American birth, like the mother of my mistress. All the Spanish blood they had came from the Zaviers. But, you see, that took the lead!"

"Aye, Rena, I see that it asserted itself. Did your mistress recognize and learn to forgive her cousin?"

"No, madam, only in dreams of madness. She never knew him at all in presence, until the day she died—always calling him Dr. Zavier, as though he were a stranger, and, truth to tell, I can scarcely wonder at this—such a
grievous change came over him. He had not a white hair in his head the day she killed Mr. Adrian, (this seems his true name to me, madam, though I know it was not), and he had not a black one left when he closed her eyes and laid her in her grave. But, on that last day, as at the awful day of judgment, we are told, every thing came back to her, clear and true. Her last act, after telling every one farewell, and just before taking extreme unction, was to burn her sandalwood box, with all its contents, or rather cause it to be burned on the hearth of her chamber, before her own eyes. Her own mother had never read those letters, for I hid them away from every one, and when she asked for them, at last, they were ready for her hand. For this she blessed me.”

“Is your master Richard living, Rena? and did he ever marry?” I asked, dashing away a tear.

“No, madam; he, too, is dead. He lived as long as he could for his sisters' sake, but the struggle could not last. His proud heart was broken with his idol, for you see he had set great store by my mistress in every way. She was the pride of his life.”

“I see, I see, Rena. Truly, he merited a better fate—a noble man, as also might have been the man she slew.” I groaned at the bitterness of my retrospections, then inquired again,

“And Madame Zavier, Rena—how did she bear this blow? and what became of her?”

“She lives where she lived then, madam—at Les Boccages—surrounded by her sons and their children, and happy again, I believe, as she deserves to be. She was one who could rise up from any affliction, after the time of trouble was over. But she did her duty by my mistress right motherly, and helped me nurse her night and day, until she passed away.”

The woman wept for a time, silently, yet almost convulsively; then, looking up again, asked the question which I had long before promised her to answer before we parted:

“And now tell me, madam, as you agreed to do when I began—what interest you took in Mr. Marstyn that you should so desire to hear his story? Might you have been his wife, sister, or any of his kin-in-law, since you have a husband of your own, and have assured me that no drop of your blood flowed in his veins?”

I answered very quietly, (for my husband's step was on the stairs—the husband I loved entirely—though not with the wild passion of that earlier dream),

“I was his wife, Rena.”

THE END.
1776—CENTENNIAL—1876

Printing Presses,
With or without Indelible Ink.

WALTON & CO.,
Stationers and Booksellers,
529 AND 531 NORTH EIGHTH STREET,
PHILADELPHIA.

—See Samples of Type below.—
The Cheapest Novels in the World

A DOLLAR BOOK FOR TWENTY-FIVE CENTS

The Best Works of the Most Popular Living Writers

The wide-spread demand for popular books at such rates as places them within the reach of every one, has induced Messrs. BEADLE & ADAMS to introduce to their extensive lists of cheap publications a new and highly attractive series, comprising only

The Cheapest Productions of Fiction and Romance

of the leading living American writers, who are now the stars of the popular weeklies, whose creations are the admiration of all who demand strength of story, originality of character, subtle interest of plot and construction which separates the masters of the pen from the men.

These novels will contain superb stories by

MRS. MAY AGNES FLEMING,
MRS. M. Y. VICTOR,
MRS. JENNIE DAVIS BURTON,
BARTLEY T. CAMPBELL,
MARCET BLOUNT,
MRS. MARY REED CROW

Etc., Etc., Etc.

Each Volume a Complete Novel, and sold at the remarkably cheap price indicated above. The first issues will be

I. THE DARK SECRET; or, the Mystery of Fontelle Hall. By May Agnes Fleming.

II. THE MADDIEST MARRIAGE EVER WAS. By Mrs. Jennie Davis Burton.

III. A WOMAN'S HEART; or, Haude Arnold's Engagement. By Ml. Victor.

IV. AN AWFUL MYSTERY; or, Sybil Campbell, the Queen of the Well. By Mrs. May Agnes Fleming.

V. THE PRIDE OF THE DOWNES; or, the Mystery of the Well. By Margaret Blount.

VI. VICTORIA; or, the Heiress of Castle Bidle. By Mrs. May Agnes Fleming.

VII. THE DEAD LETTER. By Society Regulator.

VIII. STRANGELY WED; or, Where was Arthur Clevedon? By Mrs. Jennie Davis Burton.

IX. ROMANCE OF THE GREEN SEAL. By Mrs. Catharine A. Ward.

X. EUPHINIE; or, the Gipsy Queen's Vow. By Mrs. May Agnes Fleming. February 15th.

XI. LOVE IN A HAZE; or, The Debutante's Disenchantment. By Mrs. May Agnes Fleming. Ready April 15th.

XII. THE TWIN SISTERS; or, The Wretched Wife's Hate. By Mrs. May Agnes Fleming. Ready April 15th.

Sold by all Newsdealers and Booksellers; or sent, post paid, on receipt of price, twenty-five cents per volume, by

BEADLE & ADAMS, Publishers

93 William Street, New York