

The Money Master, Volume 2.

Gilbert Parker

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THE MONEY MASTER

By Gilbert Parker

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CHAPTER IV

THIRTEEN YEARS AFTER AND THE CLERK OF THE COURT TELLS A STORY

It was hard to say which was the more important person in the parish, the New Cure or M'sieu' Jean Jacques Barbille. When the Old Cure was alive Jean Jacques was a lesser light, and he accepted his degree of illumination with content. But when Pere Langon was gathered to his fathers, and thousands had turned away from the graveyard, where he who had baptised them, confirmed them, blessed them, comforted them, and firmly led them was laid to rest, they did not turn at once to his successor with confidence and affection. The new cure, M. Savry, was young; the Old Cure had lived to be eighty-five, bearing wherever he went a lamp of wisdom at which the people lighted their small souls. The New Cure could command their obedience, but he could not command their love and confidence until he had earned them.

So it was that, for a time, Jean Jacques took the place of the Old Cure in the human side of the life of the district, though in a vastly lesser degree. Up to the death of M. Langon, Jean Jacques had done very well in life, as things go in out-of-the-way places of the world. His mill, which ground good flour, brought him increasing pence; his saw-mill more than paid its way; his farms made a small profit, in spite of a cousin who worked one on halves, but who had a spendthrift wife; the ash-factory which his own initiative had started made no money, but the loss was only small; and he had even made profit out of his lime-kilns, although Sebastian Dolores, Carmen's father, had at one time mismanaged them--but of that anon. Jean Jacques himself managed the business of money-lending and horse-dealing; and he also was agent for fire insurance and a dealer in lightning rods.

In the thirteen years since he married he had been able to keep a good many irons in the fire, and also keep them more or less hot. Many people in his and neighbouring parishes were indebted to him, and it was worth their while to stand well with him. If he insisted on debts being paid, he was never exacting or cruel. If he lent money, he never demanded more

than eight per cent.; and he never pressed his debtors unduly. His cheerfulness seldom deserted him, and he was notably kind to the poor. Not seldom in the winter time a poor man, here and there in the parish, would find dumped down outside his door in the early morning a half-cord of wood or a bag of flour.

It could not be said that Jean Jacques did not enjoy his own generosity. His vanity, however, did not come from an increasing admiration of his own personal appearance, a weakness which often belongs to middle age; but from the study of his so-called philosophy, which in time became an obsession with him. In vain the occasional college professors, who spent summer months at St. Saviour's, sought to interest him in science and history, for his philosophy had large areas of boredom; but science marched over too jagged a road for his tender intellectual feet; the wild places where it led dismayed him. History also meant numberless dates and facts. Perhaps he could have managed the dates, for he was quick at figures, but the facts were like bees in their hive,--he could scarcely tell one from another by looking at them.

So it was that Jean Jacques kept turning his eyes, as he thought, to the everlasting meaning of things, to "the laws of Life and the decrees of Destiny." He was one of those who had found, as he thought, what he could do, and was sensible enough to do it. Let the poor fellows, who gave themselves to science, trouble their twisted minds with trigonometry and the formula of some grotesque chemical combination; let the dull people rub their noses in the ink of Greek and Latin, which was no use for everyday consumption; let the heads of historians ache with the warring facts of the lives of nations; it all made for sleep. But philosophy--ah, there was a field where a man could always use knowledge got from books or sorted out of his own experiences!

It happened, therefore, that Jean Jacques, who not too vaguely realized that there was reputation to be got from being thought a philosopher, always carried about with him his little compendium from the quay at Quebec, which he had brought ashore inside his redflannel shirt, with the antique silver watch, when the Antoine went down.

Thus also it was that when a lawyer in court at Vilray, four miles from St. Saviour's, asked him one day, when he stepped into the witness-box, what he was, meaning what was his occupation, his reply was, "Moi-je suis M'sieu' Jean Jacques, philosophe--(Me--I am M'sieu' Jean Jacques, philosopher)."

A little later outside the court-house, the Judge who had tried the case --M. Carcasson--said to the Clerk of the Court:

"A curious, interesting little man, that Monsieur Jean Jacques. What's his history?"

"A character, a character, monsieur le juge," was the reply of M. Amand Fille. "His family has been here since Frontenac's time. He is a figure in the district, with a hand in everything. He does enough foolish things to ruin any man, yet swims along--swims along. He has many kinds of business--mills, stores, farms, lime-kilns, and all that, and keeps them all going; and as if he hadn't enough to do, and wasn't risking enough, he's now organizing a cheese-factory on the co-operative principle, as in Upper Canada among the English."

"He has a touch of originality, that's sure," was the reply of the Judge.

The Clerk of the Court nodded and sighed. "Monseigneur Giron of Laval, the greatest scholar in Quebec, he said to me once that M'sieu' Jean Jacques missed being a genius by an inch. But, monsieur le juge, not to have that inch is worse than to be an ignoramus."

Judge Carcasson nodded. "Ah, surely! Your Jean Jacques lacks a balance-wheel. He has brains, but not enough. He has vision, but it is not steady; he has argument, but it breaks down just where it should be most cohesive. He interested me. I took note of every turn of his mind as he gave evidence. He will go on for a time, pulling his strings, doing this and doing that, and then, all at once, when he has got a train of complications, his brain will not be big enough to see the way out. Tell me, has he a balance-wheel in his home--a sensible wife, perhaps?"

The Clerk of the Court shook his head mournfully and seemed to hesitate. Then he said, "Comme ci, comme ca--but no, I will speak the truth about it. She is a Spaniard--the Spanische she is called by the neighbours. I will tell you all about that, and you will wonder that he has carried on as well as he has, with his vanity and his philosophy."

"He'll have need of his philosophy before he's done, or I don't know human nature; he'll get a bad fall one of these days," responded the Judge. "'Moi-je suis M'sieu' Jean Jacques, philosophe'--that is what he said. Bumptious little man, and yet--and yet there's something in him. There's a sense of things which everyone doesn't have--a glimmer of life beyond his own orbit, a catching at the biggest elements of being, a hovering on the confines of deep understanding, as it were. Somehow I feel almost sorry for him, though he annoyed me while he was in the witness-box, in spite of myself. He was as the English say, so 'damn sure.'"

"So damn sure always," agreed the Clerk of the Court, with a sense of pleasure that his great man, this wonderful aged little judge, should have shown himself so human as to use such a phrase.

"But, no doubt, the sureness has been a good servant in his business," returned the Judge. "Confidence in a weak world gets unearned profit often. But tell me about his wife--the Spanische. Tell me the how and why, and everything. I'd like to trace our little money-man wise to his source."

Again M. Fille was sensibly agitated. "She is handsome, and she has great, good gifts when she likes to use them," he answered. "She can do as much in an hour as most women can do in two; but then she will not keep at it. Her life is but fits and starts. Yet she has a good head for business, yes, very good. She can see through things. Still, there it is--she will not hold fast from day to day."

"Yes, yes, but where did she come from? What was the field where she grew?"

"To be sure, monsieur. It was like this," responded the other.

Thereupon M. Fille proceeded to tell the history, musical with legend, of Jean Jacques' Grand Tour, of the wreck of the Antoine, of the marriage of the "seigneur," the home-coming, and the life that followed, so far as rumour, observation, and a mind with a gift for narrative, which was not to be incomplete for lack of imagination, could make it. It was only

when he offered his own reflections on Carmen Dolores, now Carmen Barbille, and on women generally, that Judge Carcasson pulled him up.

"So, so, I see. She has temperament and so on, but she's unsteady, and regarded by her neighbours not quite as one that belongs. Bah, the conceit of every race! They are all the same. The English are the worst--as though the good God was English. But the child--so beautiful, you say, and yet more like the father than the mother. He is not handsome, that Jean Jacques, but I can understand that the little one should be like him and yet beautiful too. I should like to see the child."

Suddenly the Clerk of the Court stopped and touched the arm of his distinguished friend and patron. "That is very easy, monsieur," he said eagerly, "for there she is in the red wagon yonder, waiting for her father. She adores him, and that makes trouble sometimes. Then the mother gets fits, and makes things hard at the Manor Cartier. It is not all a bed of roses for our Jean Jacques. But there it is. He is very busy all the time. Something doing always, never still, except when you will find him by the road-side, or in a tavern with all the people round him, talking, jesting, and he himself going into a trance with his book of philosophy. It is very strange that everlasting going, going, going, and yet that love of his book. I sometimes think it is all pretence, and that he is all vanity--or almost so. Heaven forgive me for my want of charity!"

The little round judge cocked his head astutely. "But you say he is kind to the poor, that he does not treat men hardly who are in debt to him, and that he will take his coat off his back to give to a tramp--is it so?"

"As so, as so, monsieur."

"Then he is not all vanity, and because of that he will feel the blow when it comes--alas, so much he will feel it!"

"What blow, monsieur le juge?--but ah, look, monsieur!" He pointed eagerly. "There she is, going to the red wagon--Madame Jean Jacques. Is she not a figure of a woman? See the walk of her--is it not distinguished? She is half a hand-breadth taller than Jean Jacques. And her face, most sure it is a face to see. If Jean Jacques was not so busy with his farms and his mills and his kilns and his usury, he would see what a woman he has got. It is his good fortune that she has such sense in business. When Jean Jacques listens to her, he goes right. She herself did not want her father to manage the lime-kilns--the old Sebastian Dolores. She was for him staying at Mirimachi, where he kept the books of the lumber firm. But no, Jean Jacques said that he could make her happy by having her father near her, and he would not believe she meant what she said. He does not understand her; that is the trouble. He knows as much of women or men as I know of--"

"Of the law--hein?" laughed the great man.

"Monsieur--ah, that is your little joke! I laugh, yes, but I laugh," responded the Clerk of the Court a little uncertainly. "Now once when she told him that the lime-kilns--"

The Judge, who had retraced his steps down the street of the town--it was little more than a large village, but because it had a court-house and a

marketplace it was called a town--that he might have a good look at Madame Jean Jacques and her child before he passed them, suddenly said:

"How is it you know so much about it all, Maitre Fille--as to what she says and of the inner secrets of the household? Ah, ha, my little Lothario, I have caught you--a bachelor too, with time on his hands, and the right side of seventy as well! The evidence you have given of a close knowledge of the household of our Jean Jacques does not have its basis in hearsay, but in acute personal observation. Tut-tut! Fie-fie! my little gay Clerk of the Court. Fie! Fie!"

M. Fille was greatly disconcerted. He had never been a Lothario. In forty years he had never had an episode with one of "the other sex," but it was not because he was impervious to the softer emotions. An intolerable shyness had ever possessed him when in the presence of women, and even small girl children had frightened him, till he had made friends with little Zoe Barbille, the daughter of Jean Jacques. Yet even with Zoe, who was so simple and companionable and the very soul of childish confidence, he used to blush and falter till she made him talk. Then he became composed, and his tongue was like a running stream, and on that stream any craft could sail. On it he became at ease with madame the Spanische, and he even went so far as to look her full in the eyes on more than one occasion.

"Answer me--ah, you cannot answer!" teasingly added the Judge, who loved his Clerk of the Court, and had great amusement out of his discomfiture. "You are convicted. At an age when a man should be settling down, you are gallivanting with the wife of a philosopher."

"Monsieur--monsieur le juge!" protested M. Fille with slowly heightening colour. "I am innocent, yes, altogether. There is nothing, believe me. It is the child, the little Zoe--but a maid of charm and kindness. She brings me cakes and the toffy made by her own hands; and if I go to the Manor Cartier, as I often do, it is to be polite and neighbourly. If Madame says things to me, and if I see what I see, and hear what I hear, it is no crime; it is no misdemeanour; it is within the law--the perfect law."

Suddenly the Judge linked his arm within that of the other, for he also was little, and he was fat and round and ruddy, and even smaller than M. Fille, who was thin, angular and pale.

"Ah, my little Confucius," he said gently, "have you seen and heard me so seldom that you do not know me yet, or what I really think? Of course it is within the law--the perfect law--to visit at m'sieu' the philosopher's house and talk at length also to m'sieu' the philosopher's wife; while to make the position regular by friendship with the philosopher's child is a wisdom which I can only ascribe to"--his voice was charged with humour and malicious badinage "to an extended acquaintance with the devices of human nature, as seen in those episodes of the courts with which you have been long familiar."

"Oh, monsieur, dear monsieur!" protested the Clerk of the Court, "you always make me your butt."

"My friend," said the Judge, squeezing his arm, "if I could have you no other way, I would make you my butler!"

Then they both laughed at the inexpensive joke, and the Clerk of the

Court was in high spirits, for on either side of the street were people with whom he lived every day, and they could see the doyen of the Bench, the great Judge Carcasson, who had refused to be knighted, arm in arm with him. Aye, and better than all, and more than all, here was Zoe Barbille drawing her mother's attention to him almost in the embrace of the magnificent jurist.

The Judge, with his small, round, quizzical eyes which missed nothing, saw too; and his attention was strangely arrested by the faces of both the mother and the child. His first glance at the woman's face made him flash an inward light on the memory of Jean Jacques' face in the witness-box, and a look of reflective irony came into his own. The face of Carmen Dolores, wife of the philosophic miller and money-master, did not belong to the world where she was placed--not because she was so unlike the habitant women, or even the wives of the big farmers, or the sister of the Cure, or the ladies of the military and commercial exiles who lived in that portion of the province; but because of an alien something in her look--a lonely, distant sense of isolation, a something which might hide a companionship and sympathy of a rare kind, or might be but the mask of a furtive, soulless nature. In the child's face was nothing of this. It was open as the day, bright with the cheerfulness of her father's countenance, alive with a humour which that countenance did not possess. The contour was like that of Jean Jacques, but with a fineness and delicacy to its fulness absent from his own; and her eyes were a deep and lustrous brown, under a forehead which had a boldness of gentle dignity possessed by neither father nor mother. Her hair was thick, brown and very full, like that of her father, and in all respects, save one, she had an advantage over both her parents. Her mouth had a sweetness which might not unfairly be called weakness, though that was balanced by a chin of commendable strength.

But the Judge's eyes found at once this vulnerable point in her character as he had found that of her mother. Delightful the child was, and alert and companionable, with no remarkable gifts, but with a rare charm and sympathy. Her face was the mirror of her mind, and it had no ulterior thought. Her mother's face, the Judge had noted, was the foreground of a landscape which had lonely shadows. It was a face of some distinction and suited to surroundings more notable, though the rural life Carmen had led since the Antoine went down and her fortunes came up, had coarsened her beauty a very little.

"There's something stirring in the coverts," said the Judge to himself as he was introduced to the mother and child. By a hasty gesture Zoe gave a command to M. Fille to help her down. With a hand on his shoulder she dropped to the ground. Her object was at once apparent. She made a pretty old-fashioned curtsy to the Judge, then held out her hand, as though to reassert her democratic equality.

As the Judge looked at Madame Barbille, he was involuntarily, but none the less industriously, noting her characteristics; and the sum of his reflections, after a few moments' talk, was that dangers he had seen ahead of Jean Jacques, would not be averted by his wife, indeed might easily have their origin in her.

"I wonder it has gone on as long as it has," he said to himself; though it seemed unreasonable that his few moments with her, and the story told him by the Clerk of the Court, should enable him to come to any definite conclusion. But at eighty-odd Judge Carcasson was a Solon and a Solomon in one. He had seen life from all angles, and he was not prepared to

give any virtue or the possession of any virtue too much rope; while nothing in life surprised him.

"How would you like to be a judge?" he asked of Zoe, suddenly taking her hand in his. A kinship had been at once established between them, so little has age, position, and intellect to do with the natural gravitations of human nature.

She did not answer direct, and that pleased him. "If I were a judge I should have no jails," she said. "What would you do with the bad people?" he asked.

"I would put them alone on a desert island, or out at sea in a little boat, or out on the prairies without a horse, so that they'd have to work for their lives."

"Oh, I see! If M. Fille here set fire to a house, you would drop him on the prairie far away from everything and everybody and let him 'root hog or die'?"

"Don't you think it would kill him or cure him?" she asked whimsically.

The Judge laughed, his eyes twinkling. "That's what they did when the world was young, dear ma'm'selle. There was no time to build jails. Alone on the prairie--a separate prairie for every criminal--that would take a lot of space; but the idea is all right. It mightn't provide the proper degree of punishment, however. But that is being too particular. Alone on the prairie for punishment--well, I should like to see it tried."

He remembered that saying of his long after, while yet he was alive, and a tale came to him from the prairies which made his eyes turn more intently towards a land that is far off, where the miserable miscalculations and mistakes of this world are readjusted. Now he was only conscious of a primitive imagination looking out of a young girl's face, and making a bridge between her understanding and his own.

"What else would you do if you were a judge?" he asked presently.

"I would make my father be a miller," she replied. "But he is a miller, I hear."

"But he is so many other things--so many. If he was only a miller we should have more of him. He is at home only a little. If I get up early enough in the morning, or if I am let stay up at night late enough, I see him; but that is not enough--is it, mother?" she added with a sudden sense that she had gone too far, that she ought not to say this perhaps.

The woman's face had darkened for an instant, and irritation showed in her eyes, but by an effort of the will she controlled herself.

"Your father knows best what he can do and can't do," she said evenly.

"But you would not let a man judge for himself, would you, ma'm'selle?" asked the old inquisitor. "You would judge for the man what was best for him to do?"

"I would judge for my father," she replied. "He is too good a man to judge for himself."

"Well, there's a lot of sense in that, ma'm'selle philosophe," answered Judge Carcasson. "You would make the good idle, and make the bad work. The good you would put in a mill to watch the stones grind, and the bad you would put on a prairie alone to make the grist for the grinding. Ma'm'selle, we must be friends--is it not so?"

"Haven't we always been friends?" the young girl asked with the look of a visionary suddenly springing up in her eyes.

Here was temperament indeed. She pleased Judge Carcasson greatly. "But yes, always, and always, and always," he replied. Inwardly he said to himself, "I did not see that at first. It is her father in her.

"Zoe!" said her mother reprovingly.

CHAPTER V

THE CLERK OF THE COURT ENDS HIS STORY

A moment afterwards the Judge, as he walked down the street still arm in arm with the Clerk of the Court, said: "That child must have good luck, or she will not have her share of happiness. She has depths that are not deep enough." Presently he added, "Tell me, my Clerk, the man--Jean Jacques--he is so much away--has there never been any talk about--about."

"About--monsieur le juge?" asked M. Fille rather stiffly. "For instance --about what?"

"For instance, about a man--not Jean Jacques."

The lips of the Clerk of the Court tightened. "Never at any time--till now, monsieur le juge."

"Ah--till now!"

The Clerk of the Court blushed. What he was about to say was difficult, but he alone of all the world guessed at the tragedy which was hovering over Jean Jacques' home. By chance he had seen something on an afternoon of three days before, and he had fled from it as a child would fly from a demon. He was a purist at law, but he was a purist in life also, and not because the flush of youth had gone and his feet were on the path which leads into the autumn of a man's days. The thing he had seen had been terribly on his mind, and he had felt that his own judgment was not sufficient for the situation, that he ought to tell someone.

The Cure was the only person who had come to his mind when he became troubled to the point of actual mental agony. But the new curb, M. Savry, was not like the Old Cure, and, besides, was it not stepping between the woman and her confessional? Yet he felt that something ought to be done. It never occurred to him to speak to Jean Jacques. That would have seemed so brutal to the woman. It came to him to speak to Carmen, but he knew that he dared not do so. He could not say to a woman that which must shame her before him, she who had kept her head so arrogantly high--not so much to him, however, as to the rest of the world. He had not the courage; and yet he had fear lest some awful thing

would at any moment now befall the Manor Cartier. If it did, he would feel himself to blame had he done nothing to stay the peril. So far he was the only person who could do so, for he was the only person who knew!

The Judge could feel his friend's arm tremble with emotion, and he said: "Come, now, my Plato, what is it? A man has come to disturb the peace of Jean Jacques, our philosophe, eh?"

"That is it, monsieur--a man of a kind."

"Oh, of course, my bambino, of course, a man 'of a kind,' or there would be no peace disturbed. You want to tell me, I see. Proceed then; there is no reason why you should not. I am secret. I have seen much. I have no prejudices. As you will, however; but I can see it would relieve your mind to tell me. In truth I felt there was something when I saw you look at her first, when you spoke to her, when she talked with me. She is a fine figure of a woman, and Jean Jacques, as you say, is much away from home. In fact he neglects her--is it not so?"

"He means it not, but it is so. His life is full of--"

"Yes, yes, of stores and ash-factories and debtors and lightning-rods and lime-kilns, and mortgaged farms, and the price of wheat--but certainly, I understand it all, my Fille. She is too much alone, and if she has travelled by the compass all these thirteen years without losing the track, it is something to the credit of human nature."

"Ah, monsieur, a vow before the good God--!" The Judge interrupted sharply. "Tut, tut--these vows! Do you not know that a vow may be a thing that ruins past redemption? A vow is sacred. Well, a poor mortal in one moment of weakness breaks it. Then there is a sense of awful shame of being lost, of never being able to put right the breaking of the vow, though the rest can be put right by sorrow and repentance! I would have no vows. They haunt like ghosts when they are broken, they torture like fire then. Don't talk to me of vows. It is not vows that keep the world right, but the prayer of a man's soul from day to day."

The Judge's words sounded almost blasphemous to M. Fille. A vow not keep the world right! Then why the vows of the Church at baptism, at confirmation, at marriage? Why the vows of the priests, of the nuns, of those who had given themselves to eternal service? Monsieur had spoken terrible things. And yet he had said at the last: "It is not vows that keep the world right, but the prayer of a man's soul from day to day." That was not heretical, or atheistic, or blasphemous. It sounded logical and true and good.

He was about to say that, to some people, vows were the only way of keeping them to their duty--and especially women--but the Judge added gently: "I would not for the world hurt your sensibilities, my little Clerk, and we are not nearly so far apart as you think at the minute. Thank God, I keep the faith that is behind all faith--the speech of a man's soul with God. . . . But there, if you can, let us hear what man it is who disturbs the home of the philosopher. It is not my Fille, that's sure."

He could not resist teasing, this judge who had a mind of the most rare uprightness; and he was not always sorry when his teasing hurt; for, to his mind, men should be lashed into strength, when they drooped over the

tasks of life; and what so sharp a lash as ridicule or satire!

"Proceed, my friend," he urged brusquely, not waiting for the gasp of pained surprise of the little Clerk to end. He was glad to see the figure beside him presently straighten itself, as though to be braced for a task of difficulty. Indignation and resentment were good things to stiffen a man's back.

"It was three days ago," said M. Fille. "I saw it with my own eyes. I had come to the Manor Cartier by the road, down the hill--Mont Violet--behind the house. I could see into the windows of the house. There was no reason why I should not see--there never has been a reason," he added, as though to justify himself.

"Of course, of course, my friend. One's eyes are open, and one sees what one sees, without looking for it. Proceed."

"As I looked down I saw Madame with a man's arms round her, and his lips to hers. It was not Jean Jacques."

"Of course, of course. Proceed. What did you do?"

"I stopped. I fell back--"

"Of course. Behind a tree?"

"Behind some elderberry bushes."

"Of course. Elderberry bushes--that's better than a tree. I am very fond of elderberry wine when it is new. Proceed."

The Clerk of the Court shrank. What did it matter whether or no the Judge liked elderberry wine, when the world was falling down for Jean Jacques and his Zoe--and his wife. But with a sigh he continued: "There is nothing more. I stayed there for awhile, and then crept up the hill again, and came back to my home and locked myself in."

"What had you done that you should lock yourself in?"

"Ah, monsieur, how can I explain such things? Perhaps I was ashamed that I had seen things I should not have seen. I do not blush that I wept for the child, who is--but you saw her, monsieur le juge."

"Yes, yes, the little Zoe, and the little philosopher. Proceed."

"What more is there to tell!"

"A trifle perhaps, as you will think," remarked the Judge ironically, but as one who, finding a crime, must needs find the criminal too. "I must ask you to inform the Court who was the too polite friend of Madame."

"Monsieur, pardon me. I forgot. It is essential, of course. You must know that there is a flume, a great wooden channel--"

"Yes, yes. I comprehend. Once I had a case of a flume. It was fifteen feet deep and it let in the water of the river to the mill-wheels. A flume regulates, concentrates, and controls the water power. I comprehend perfectly. Well?"

"So. This flume for Jean Jacques' mill was also fifteen feet deep or more. It was out of repair, and Jean Jacques called in a master-carpenter from Laplatte, Masson by name--George Masson--to put the flume right."

"How long ago was that?"

"A month ago. But Masson was not here all the time. It was his workmen who did the repairs, but he came over to see--to superintend. At first he came twice in the week. Then he came every day."

"Ah, then he came every day! How do you know that?"

"It was my custom to walk to the mill every day--to watch the work on the flume. It was only four miles away across the fields and through the woods, making a walk of much charm--especially in the autumn, when the colours of the foliage are so fine, and the air has a touch of pensiveness, so that one is induced to reflection."

There was the slightest tinge of impatience in the Judge's response. "Yes, yes, I understand. You walked to study life and to reflect and to enjoy your intimacy with nature, but also to see our friend Zoe and her home. And I do not wonder. She has a charm which makes me sad--for her."

"So I have felt, so I have felt for her, monsieur. When she is gayest, and when, as it might seem, I am quite happy, talking to her, or picnicking, or idling on the river, or helping her with her lessons, I have sadness, I know not why."

The Judge pressed his friend's arm firmly. His voice grew more insistent. "Now, Maitre Fille, I think I understand the story, but there are lacunee which you must fill. You say the thing happened three days ago--now, when will the work be finished?"

"The work will be finished to-morrow, monsieur. Only one workman is left, and he will be quit of his task to-night."

"So the thing--the comedy or tragedy will come to an end to-morrow?" remarked the Judge seriously. "How did you find out that the workmen go tomorrow, maitre?"

"Jean Jacques--he told me yesterday."

"Then it all ends to-morrow," responded the Judge.

The puzzled subordinate stood almost still, and looked at the Judge in wonder. Why should it all end to-morrow simply because the work was finished at the flume? At last he spoke.

"It is only twelve miles to Laplatte where George Masson lives, and he has, besides, another contract near here, but three miles from the Manor Cartier. Also besides, how can we know what she will do--Jean Jacques' wife. How can we tell but that she will perhaps go and leave the beloved Zoe alone!"

"And leave our little philosopher--miller also alone?" remarked the Judge quizzically, yet with solemnity. M. Fille was agitated; he made a protesting gesture. "Jean Jacques can find comfort, but the child--ah,

no, it is too terrible! Someone should speak. I tried to do it--to Madame Carmen, to Jean Jacques; but it was no use. How could I betray her to him, how could I tell her that I knew her shame!"

The Judge turned brusquely and caught his friend by the shoulders, fastening him with the eyes which had made many a witness forget to lie.

"If you were an avocat in practice I would ruin your reputation, Fille," he said. "A fool would tell Jean Jacques, or speak to the woman, and spoil all; for women go mad when they are in danger, and they do the impossible things. But did it not occur to you that the one person to have in a quiet room with the doors shut, with the light of the sun in his face, with the book of the law open on your desk and the damages to be got by an injured husband, in a Catholic province with a Catholic Judge, written down on a piece of paper, to hand over at the right moment--did it not strike you that that person was your George Masson?"

M. Fille's head dropped before the disdainful eyes of M. Carcasson. He who prided himself in keeping the court right on points of procedure, who was looked upon almost with the respect given the position of the Judge himself, that he should fail in thinking of the obvious thing was humiliating, and alas! so disconcerting.

"I am a fool, an imbecile," he responded, in great dejection.

"This much must be said, my imbecile, that every man some time or other makes just such a fool of his intelligence," was the soft reply.

A thin hand made a gesture of dissent. "Not you, monsieur. Never!"

"If it is any comfort to you, know then, my Solon, that I have done so publicly in my time, while you have only done it privately. But let us see. That Masson must be struck of a heap. What sort of a man is he to look at? Apart from his morals, what class of creature is he?"

"He is a man of strength, of force in his way, monsieur. He made himself from an apprentice without a cent, and he has now thirty men at work."

"Then he does not drink or gamble?"

"Neither, monsieur."

"Has he a family?"

"No, monsieur."

"How old is he?"

"Forty or thereabouts, monsieur."

The Judge cogitated for a moment, then said: "Ah, that's bad--unmarried and forty, and no vices except this. It gives him few escape-valves. Is he good-looking? What is his appearance?"

"Nor short, nor tall, and square shoulders. His face like the yellow brown of a peach, hair that curls close to his head, blue eyes that see everything, and a big hand that knows what it is doing."

The Judge nodded. "Ah, you have watched him, maitre. . . . When?"

Since then?"

"No, no, monsieur, not since. If I had watched him since, I should perhaps have thought of the right thing to do. But I did not. I used to study him while the work was going on, when he first came, but I have known him some time from a distance. If a man makes himself what he is, you look at him, of course."

"Truly. His temper--his disposition, what is it?" M. Fille was very much alive now. He replied briskly. "Like the snap of a whip. He flies into anger and flies out. He has a laugh that makes men say, 'How he enjoys himself!' and his mind is very quick and sure."

The Judge nodded with satisfaction. "Well done! Well done! I have got him in my eye. He will not be so easy to handle; but, if he has brains, he will see that you have the right end of the stick; and he will kiss and ride away. It will not be easy, but the game is in your hands, my Fille. In a quiet room, with the book of the law open, and figures of damages given by a Catholic court and Judge--I think that will do it; and then the course of true philosophy will not long be interrupted in the house of Jean Jacques Barbille."

"Monsieur--monsieur le juge, you mean that I shall do this, shall see George Masson and warn him--me?"

"Who else? You are a friend of the family. You are a public officer, to whom the good name of your parish is dear. As all are aware, no doubt, you are the trusted ancient comrade of the daughter of the woman--I speak legally--Carmen Barbille nee Dolores, a name of charm to the ear. Who but you then to do it?"

"There is yourself, monsieur."

"Dismiss me from your mind. I go to Quebec to-night, as you know, and there is not time; but even if there were, I should not be the best person to do this. I am known to few; you are known to all. I have no locus standi. You have. No, no, it would not be for me."

Suddenly, in his desperation, the Clerk of the Court sought release for himself from this solemn and frightening duty.

"Monsieur," he said eagerly, "there is another. I had forgotten. It is Madame Carmen's father, Sebastian Dolores."

"Ah, a father! Yes, I had forgotten to ask about him; so we are one in our imbecility, my little Aristotle. This Sebastian Dolores, where is he?"

"In the next parish, Beauharnais, keeping books for a lumber-firm. Ah, monsieur, that is the way to deal with the matter--through Sebastian Dolores, her father!"

"What sort is he?"

The other shook his head and did not answer. "Ah, not of the best? Drinks?"

M. Fille nodded.

"Has a weak character?"

Again M. Fille nodded.

"Has no good reputation hereabouts?"

The nod was repeated. "He has never been steady He goes here and there, but always he comes back to get Jean Jacques' help. He and his daughter are not close friends, and yet he likes to be near her. She can endure him at least. He can command her interest. He is a stranger in a strange land, and he drifts back to where she is always. But that is all."

"Then he is out of the question, and he would be always out of the question except as a last resort; for sooner or later he would tell his daughter, and challenge our George Masson too; and that is what you do not wish, eh?"

"Precisely so," remarked M. Fille, dropping back again into gloom. "To be quite honest, monsieur, even though it gives me a task which I abhor, I do not think that M. Dolores could do what is needed without mistakes which could not be mended. At least I can--" He stopped.

The Judge interposed at once, well pleased with the way things were going for this "case." "Assuredly. You can as can no other, my Solon. The secret of success in such things is a good heart, a right mind, a clear intelligence and some astuteness, and you have it all. It is your task and yours only."

The little man's self-respect seemed restored. He preened himself somewhat and bowed to the Judge. "I take your commands, monsieur, to obey them as heaven gives me power so to do. Shall it be tomorrow?"

The Judge reflected a moment, then said: "Tonight would be better, but--"

"I can do it better to-morrow morning," interposed M. Fille, "for George Masson has a meeting here at Vilray with the avocat Prideaux at ten o'clock to sign a contract, and I can ask him to step into my office on a little affair of business. He will not guess, and I shall be armed"--the Judge frowned--"with the book of the law on such misdemeanours, and the figures of the damages,"--the Judge smiled--"and I think perhaps I can frighten him as he has never been frightened before."

A courage and confidence had now taken possession of the Clerk in strange contrast to his timidity and childlike manner of a few minutes before. He was now as he appeared in court, clothed with an austere authority which gave him a vicarious strength and dignity. The Judge had done his work well, and he was of those folk in the world who are not content to do even the smallest thing ill.

Arm in arm they passed into the garden which fronted the vine-covered house, where Maitre Fille lived alone with his sister, a tiny edition of himself, who whispered and smiled her way through life.

She smiled and whispered now in welcome to the Judge; and as she did so, the three saw Jean Jacques, laughing, and cracking his whip, drive past with his daughter beside him, chirruping to the horses; while, moody and abstracted, his wife sat silent on the backseat of the red wagon.

CHAPTER VI

JEAN JACQUES HAD HAD A GREAT DAY

Jean Jacques was in great good humour as he drove away to the Manor Cartier. The day, which was not yet aged, had been satisfactory from every point of view. He had impressed the Court, he had got a chance to pose in the witness-box; he had been able to repeat in evidence the numerous businesses in which he was engaged; had referred to his acquaintance with the Lieutenant-Governor and a Cardinal; to his Grand Tour (this had been hard to do in the cross-examination to which he was subjected, but he had done it); and had been able to say at the very start in reply as to what was his occupation--"Moi je suis M'sieu' Jean Jacques, philosophe."

Also he had, during the day, collected a debt long since wiped off his books; he had traded a poor horse for a good cow; he had bought all the wheat of a Vilray farmer below market-price, because the poor fellow needed ready money; he had issued an insurance policy; his wife and daughter had conversed in the public streets with the great judge who was the doyen of the provincial Bench; and his daughter had been kissed by the same judge in the presence of at least a dozen people. He was, in fact, very proud of his Carmen and his Carmencita, as he called the two who sat in the red wagon sharing his glory--so proud that he did not extol them to others; and he was quite sure they were both very proud of him. The world saw what his prizes of life were, and there was no need to praise or brag. Dignity and pride were both sustained by silence and a wave of the hand, which in fact said to the world, "Look you, my masters, they belong to Jean Jacques. Take heed."

There his domestic scheme practically ended. He was so busy that he took his joys by snatches, in moments of suspension of actual life, as it were. His real life was in the eddy of his many interests, in the field of his superficial culture, in the eyes of the world. The worst of him was on the surface. He showed what other men hid, that was all. Their vanity was concealed, he wore it in his cap. They put on a manner as they put on their clothes, and wore it out in the world, or took it off in their own homes--behind the door of life; but he was the same vain, frank, cocksure fellow in his home as in the street. There was no difference at all. He was vain, but he had no conceit; and therefore he did not deceive, and was not tyrannous or dictatorial; in truth, if you but estimated him at his own value, he was the least insistent man alive. Many a debtor knew this; and, by asking Jean Jacques' advice, making an appeal to his logic, as it were--and it was always worth listening to, even when wrong or sadly obvious, because of the glow with which he declared things this or that--found his situation immediately eased. Many a hard-up countryman, casting about for a five-dollar bill, could get it of Jean Jacques by telling him what agreeable thing some important person had said about him; or by writing to a great newspaper in Montreal a letter, saying that the next candidate for the provincial legislature should be M. Jean Jacques Barbille, of St. Saviour's. This never failed to draw a substantial "bill" from the wad which Jean Jacques always carried in his pocket--loose, not tied up in a leather roll, as so many lesser men freighted the burdens of their wealth.

He had changed since the day he left Bordeaux on the Antoine; since he

had first caught the flash of interest in Carmen Dolores' eyes--an interest roused from his likeness to a conspirator who had been shot for his country's good. He was no stouter in body, for he was of the kind that wear away the flesh by much doing and thinking; but there were occasional streaks of grey in his bushy hair, and his eye roamed less than it did once. In the days when he first brought Carmen home, his eye was like a bead of brown light on a swivel. It flickered and flamed; it saw here, saw there; it twinkled, and it pierced into life's mysteries; and all the while it was a good eye. Its whites never showed, as it were. As an animal, his eye showed a nature free from vice. In some respects he was easy to live with, for he never found fault with what was given him to eat, or the way the house was managed; and he never interfered with the "kitchen people," or refused a dollar or ten dollars to Carmen for finery. In fact, he was in a sense too lavish, for he used at one time to bring her home presents of silks and clothes and toilet things and stockings and hats, which were not in accord with her taste, and only vexed her. Indeed, she resented wearing them, and could hardly bring herself to thank him for them. At last, however, she induced him to let her buy what she wanted with the presents of money which he might give her.

On the whole Carmen fared pretty well, for he would sometimes give her a handful of bills from his pocket, bidding her take ten dollars, and she would coolly take twenty, while he shrugged his shoulders and declared she would be his ruin. He had never repented of marrying her, in spite of the fact that she did not always keep house as his mother and grandmother had kept it; that she was gravely remiss in going to mass; and that she quarrelled with more than one of her neighbours, who had an idea that Spain was an inferior country because it was south of France, just as the habitants regarded the United States as a low and inferior country because it was south of Quebec. You went north towards heaven and south towards hell, in their view; but when they went so far as to patronize or slander Carmen, she drove her verbal stiletos home without a button; so that on one occasion there would have been a law-suit for libel if the Old Cure had not intervened. To Jean Jacques' credit, be it said, he took his wife's part on this occasion, though in his heart he knew that she was in the wrong.

He certainly was not always in the right himself. If he had been told that he neglected his wife he would have been justly indignant. Also, it never occurred to him that a woman did not always want to talk philosophy or discuss the price of wheat or the cost of flour-barrels; and that for a man to be stupidly and foolishly fond was dearer to a woman than anything else. How should he know--yet he ought to have done so, if he really was a philosopher--that a woman would want the cleverest man in the world to be a boy and play the fool sometimes; that she would rather, if she was a healthy woman, go to a circus than to a revelation of the mysteries of the mind from an altar of culture, if her own beloved man was with her.

Carmen had been left too much alone, as M. Fille had said to Judge Carcasson. Her spirits had moments of great dullness, when she was ready to fling herself into the river--or the arms of the schoolmaster or the farrier. When she first came to St. Saviour's, the necessity of adapting herself to the new conditions, of keeping faith with herself, which she had planned on the Antoine, and making a good wife to the man who was to solve all her problems for her, prevailed. She did not at first miss so much the life of excitement, of danger, of intrigue, of romance, of colour and variety, which she had left behind in Spain. When her child

was born, she became passionately fond of it; her maternal spirit smothered it. It gave the needed excitement in the routine of life at St. Saviour's.

Yet the interest was not permanent. There came a time when she resented the fact that Jean Jacques made more of the child than he did of herself. That was a bad day for all concerned, for dissimulation presently became necessary, and the home of Jean Jacques was a home of mystery which no philosophy could interpret. There had never been but the one child. She was not less handsome than when Jean Jacques married her and brought her home, though the bloom of maiden youthfulness was no longer there; and she certainly was a cut far above the habitant women or even the others of a higher social class, in a circle which had an area equal to a principality in Europe.

The old cure, M. Langon, had had much influence over her, for few could resist the amazing personal influence which his rare pure soul secured over the worst. It was a sad day to her when he went to his long home; and inwardly she felt a greater loss than she had ever felt, save that once when her Carvillho Gonzales went the way of the traitor. Memories of her past life far behind in Madrid did not grow fainter; indeed, they grew more distinct as the years went on. They seemed to vivify, as her discontent and restlessness grew.

Once, when there had come to St. Saviour's a middle-aged baron from Paris who had heard the fishing was good at St. Saviour's, and talked to her of Madrid and Barcelona, of Cordova and Toledo, as one who had seen and known and (he declared) loved them; who painted for her in splashing impressionist pictures the life that still eddied in the plazas and dreamed in the patios, she had been almost carried off her feet with longing; and she nearly gave that longing an expression which would have brought a tragedy, while still her Zoe was only eight years old. But M. Langon, the wise priest whose eyes saw and whose heart understood, had intervened in time; and she never knew that the sudden disappearance of the Baron, who still owed fifty dollars to Jean Jacques, was due to the practical wisdom of a great soul which had worked out its own destiny in a little back garden of the world.

When this good priest was alive she felt she had a friend who was as large of heart as he was just, and who would not scorn the fool according to his folly, or chastise the erring after his deserts. In his greatness of soul Pere Langon had shut his eyes to things that pained him more than they shocked him, for he had seen life in its most various and demoralized forms, and indeed had had his own temptations when he lived in Belgium and France, before he had finally decided to become a priest. He had protected Carmen with a quiet persistency since her first day in the parish, and had had a saving influence over her. Pere Langon reproved those who criticized her and even slandered her, for it was evident to all that she would rather have men talk to her than women; and any summer visitor who came to fish, gave her an attention never given even to the youngest and brightest in the district; and the eyes of the habitant lass can be very bright at twenty. Yet whatever Carmen's coquetry and her sport with fire had been, her own emotions had never been really involved till now.

The new cure, M. Savry, would have said they were involved now because she never came to confession, and indeed, since the Old Cure died, she had seldom gone to mass. Yet when, with accumulated reproof on his tongue, M. Savry did come to the Manor Cartier, he felt the inherent

supremacy of beauty, not the less commanding because it had not the refinement of the duchess or the margravine.

Once M. Savry ventured to do what the Old Cure would never have done--he spoke to Jean Jacques concerning Carmen's neglect of mass and confession, and he received a rebuff which was almost au seigneur; for in Jean Jacques' eyes he was now the figure in St. Saviour's; and this was an occasion when he could assert his position as premier of the secular world outside the walls of the parish church. He did it in good style for a man who had had no particular training in the social arts.

This is how he did it and what he said:

"There have been times when I myself have thought it would be a good thing to have a rest from the duties of a Catholic, m'sieu' le cure," he remarked to M. Savry, when the latter had ended his criticism. He said it with an air of conflict, and with full intent to make his supremacy complete.

"No Catholic should speak like that," returned the shocked priest.

"No priest should speak to me as you have done," rejoined Jean Jacques. "What do you know of the reasons for the abstention of madame? The soul must enjoy rest as well as the body, and madame has a--mind which can judge for itself. I have a body that is always going, and it gets too little rest, and that keeps my soul in a flutter too. It must be getting to mass and getting to confession, and saying aves and doing penance, it is such a busy little soul of mine; but we are not all alike, and madame's body goes in a more stately way. I am like a comet, she is like the sun steady, steady, round and round, with plenty of sleep and the comfortable darkness. Sometimes madame goes hard; so does the sun in summer--shines, shines, shines like a furnace. Madame's body goes like that--at the dairy, in the garden, with the loom, among the fowls, growing her strawberries, keeping the women at the beating of the flax; and then again it is all still and idle like the sun on a cloudy day; and it rests. So it is with the human soul--I am a philosopher--I think the soul goes hard the same as the body, churning, churning away in the heat of the sun; and then it gets quiet and goes to sleep in the cloudy day, when the body is sick of its bouncing, and it has a rest--the soul has a rest, which is good for it, m'sieu'. I have worked it all out so. Besides, the soul of madame is her own. I have not made any claim upon it, and I will not expect you to do more, m'sieu' le cure."

"It is my duty to speak," protested the good priest. "Her soul is God's, and I am God's vicar--"

Jean Jacques waved a hand. "T'sh, you are not the Pope. You are not even an abbe. You were only a deacon a few years ago. You did not know how to hold a baby for the christening when you came to St. Saviour's first. For the mass, you have some right to speak; it is your duty perhaps; but the confession, that is another thing; that is the will of every soul to do or not to do. What do you know of a woman's soul--well, perhaps, you know what they have told you; but madame's soul--"

"Madame has never been to confession to me," interjected M. Savry indignantly. Jean Jacques chuckled. He had his New Cure now for sure.

"Confession is for those who have sinned. Is it that you say one must go to confession, and in order to go to confession it is needful to sin?"

M. Savry shivered with pious indignation. He had a sudden desire to rend this philosophic Catholic--to put him under the thumb-screw for the glory of the Lord, and to justify the Church; but the little Catholic miller-magnate gave freely to St. Saviour's; he was popular; he had a position; he was good to the poor; and every Christmas-time he sent a half-dozen bags of flour to the presbytery!

All Pere Savry ventured to say in reply was: "Upon your head be it, M. Jean Jacques. I have done my duty. I shall hope to see madame at mass next Sunday."

Jean Jacques had chuckled over that episode, for he had conquered; he had shown M. Savry that he was master in his own household and outside it. That much his philosophy had done for him. No other man in the parish would have dared to speak to the Cure like that. He had never scolded Carmen when she had not gone to church. Besides, there was Carmen's little daughter always at his side at mass; and Carmen always insisted on Zoe going with him, and even seemed anxious for them to be off at the first sound of the bells of St. Saviour's. Their souls were busy, hers wanted rest; that was clear. He was glad he had worked it out so cleverly to the Cure--and to his own mind. His philosophy surely had vindicated itself.

But Jean Jacques was far from thinking of these things as he drove back from Vilray and from his episode in Court to the Manor Cartier. He was indeed just praising himself, his wife, his child, and everything that belonged to him. He was planning, planning, as he talked, the new things to do--the cheese-factory, the purchase of a steam-plough and a steam-thresher which he could hire out to his neighbours. Only once during the drive did he turn round to Carmen, and then it was to ask her if she had seen her father of late.

"Not for ten months," was her reply. "Why do you ask?"

"Wouldn't he like to be nearer you and Zoe? It's twelve miles to Beauharnais," he replied.

"Are you thinking of offering him another place at the Manor?" she asked sharply.

"Well, there is the new cheese-factory--not to manage, but to keep the books! He's doing them all right for the lumber-firm. I hear that he--"

"I don't want it. No good comes from relatives working together. Look at the Latouche farm where your cousin makes his mess. My father is well enough where he is."

"But you'd like to see him oftener--I was only thinking of that," said Jean Jacques in a mollifying voice. It was the kind of thing in which he showed at once the weakness and the kindness of his nature. He was in fact not a philosopher, but a sentimentalist.

"If mother doesn't think it's sensible, why do it, father?" asked Zoe anxiously, looking up into her father's face.

She had seen the look in her mother's eyes, and also she had no love for her grandfather. Her instinct had at one time wavered regarding him; but she had seen an incident with a vanished female cook, and though she had

not understood, a prejudice had been created in her mind. She was always contrasting him with M. Fille, who, to her mind, was what a grandfather ought to be.

"I won't have him beholden to you," said Carmen, almost passionately.

"He is of my family," said Jean Jacques firmly and chivalrously. "There is no question of being beholden."

"Let well enough alone," was the gloomy reply. With a sigh, Jean Jacques turned back to the study of the road before him, to gossip with Zoe, and to keep on planning subconsciously the new things he must do.

Carmen sighed too, or rather she gave a gasp of agitation and annoyance. Her father? She had lost whatever illusion once existed regarding him. For years he had clung to her--to her pocket. He was given to drinking in past years, and he still had his sprees. Like the rest of the world, she had not in earlier years seen the furtiveness in his handsome face; but at last, as his natural viciousness became stereotyped, and bad habits matured and emphasized, she saw beneath his mask of low-class comeliness. When at last she had found it necessary to dismiss the best cook she ever had, because of him, they saw little of each other. This was coincident with his failure at the ash-factory, where he mismanaged and even robbed Jean Jacques right and left; and she had firmly insisted on Jean Jacques evicting him, on the ground that it was not Sebastian Dolores' bent to manage a business.

This little episode, as they drove home from Vilray, had an unreasonable effect upon her.

It was like the touch of a finger which launches a boat balancing in the ways onto the deep. It tossed her on a sea of agitation. She was swept away on a flood of morbid reflection.

Her husband and her daughter, laughing and talking in the front seat of the red wagon, seemed quite oblivious of her, and if ever there was a time when their influence was needed it was now. George Masson was coming over late this afternoon to inspect the work he had been doing; and she was trembling with an agitation which, however, did not show upon the surface. She had not seen him for two days--since the day after the Clerk of the Court had discovered her in the arms of a man who was not her husband; but he was coming this evening, and he was coming to-morrow for the last time; for the repair work on the flume of the dam would all be finished then.

But would the work he had been doing all be finished then? As she thought of that incident of three days ago and of its repetition on the following day, she remembered what he had said to her as she snatched herself almost violently from his arms, in a sudden access of remorse. He had said that it had to be, that there was no escape now; and at his words she had felt every pulse in her body throbbing, every vein expanding with a hot life which thrilled and tortured her. Life had been so meagre and so dull, and the man who had worshipped her on the Antoine now worshipped himself only, and also Zoe, the child, maybe; or so she thought; while the man who had once possessed her whole mind and whole heart, and never her body, back there in Spain, he, Carvillho Gonzales, would have loved her to the end, in scenes where life had colour and passion and danger and delightful movement.

She was one of those happy mortals who believe that the dead and gone lover was perfect, and that in losing him she was losing all that life had in store; but the bare, hard truth was that her Gonzales could have been true neither to her nor to any woman in the world for longer than one lingering year, perhaps one lunar month. It did not console her--she did not think of it--that the little man on the seat of the red wagon, chirruping with their daughter, had been, would always be, true to her. Of what good was fidelity if he that was faithful desired no longer as he once did?

A keen observer would have seen in the glowing, unrestful look, in the hot cheek, in the interlacing fingers, that a contest was going on in the woman's soul, as she drove homeward with all that was her own in the world. The laughter of her husband and child grated painfully on her ears. Why should they be mirthful while her life was being swept by a storm of doubt, temptation, and dark passion? Why was it?

Yet she smiled at Jean Jacques when he lifted her down from the red wagon at the door of the Manor Cartier, even though he lifted his daughter down first.

Did she smile at Jean Jacques because, as they came toward the Manor, she saw George Masson in the distance by the flume, and in that moment decided to keep her promise and meet him at a secluded point on the river-bank at sunset after supper?

CHAPTER VII

JEAN JACQUES AWAKES FROM SLEEP

The pensiveness of a summer evening on the Beau Cheval was like a veil hung over all the world. While yet the sun was shining, there was the tremor of life in the sadness; but when the last glint of amethyst and gold died away behind Mont Violet, and the melancholy swish of the river against the osiered banks rose out of the windless dusk, all the region around Manor Cartier, with its cypresses, its firs, its beeches, and its elms, became gently triste. Even the weather-vane on the Manor--the gold Cock of Beaugard, as it was called--did not move; and the stamping of a horse in the stable was like the thunderous knock of a traveller from Beyond. The white mill and the grey manor stood out with ghostly vividness in the light of the rising moon. Yet there were times innumerable when they looked like cool retreats for those who wanted rest; when, in the summer solstice, they offered the pleasant peace of the happy fireside. How often had Jean Jacques stood off from it all of a summer night and said to himself: "Look at that, my Jean Jacques. It is all yours, Manor and mills and farms and factory--all."

"Growing, growing, fattening, while I drone in my feather bed," he had as often said, with the delighted observation of the philosopher. "And me but a young man yet--but a mere boy," he would add. "I have piled it up--I have piled it up, and it keeps on growing, first one thing and then another."

Could such a man be unhappy? Finding within himself his satisfaction, his fountain of appeasement, why should not his days be days of pleasantness and peace? So it appeared to him during that summer, just

passed, when he had surveyed the World and his world within the World, and it seemed to his innocent mind that he himself had made it all. There he was, not far beyond forty, and eligible to become a member of Parliament, or even a count of the Holy Roman Empire! He had thought of both these honours, but there was so much to occupy him--he never had a moment to himself, except at night; and then there was planning and accounting to do, his foremen to see, or some knotty thing to disentangle. But when the big clock in the Manor struck ten, and he took out his great antique silver watch, to see if the two marched to the second, he would go to the door, look out into the night, say, "All's well, thank the good God," and would go to bed, very often forgetting to kiss Carmen, and even forgetting his darling little Zoe.

After all, a mind has to be very big and to have very many tentacles to hold so many things all at once, and also to remember to do the right thing at the right moment every time. He would even forget to ask Carmen to play on the guitar, which in the first days of their married life was the recreation of every evening. Seldom with the later years had he asked her to sing, because he was so busy; and somehow his ear had not that keenness of sound once belonging to it. There was a time when he himself was wont to sing, when he taught his little Zoe the tunes of the Chansons Canadiennes; but even that had dropped away, except at rare intervals, when he would sing *Le Petit Roger Bontemps*, with *Petite Fleur de Bois*, and a dozen others; but most he would sing--indeed there was never a sing-song in the Manor Cartier but he would burst forth with *A la Claire Fontaine* and its haunting refrain:

"Il y a longtemps que je t'aime,
Jamais je ne t'oublierai."

But this very summer, when he had sung it on the birthday of the little Zoe, his voice had seemed out of tune. At first he had thought that Carmen was playing his accompaniment badly on the guitar, but she had sharply protested against that, and had appealed to M. Fille, who was present at the pretty festivity. He had told the truth, as a Clerk of the Court should. He said that Jean Jacques' voice was not as he had so often heard it; but he would also frankly admit that he did not think madame played the song as he had heard her play it aforetime, and that covered indeed twelve years or more--in fact, since the birth of the renowned Zoe.

M. Fille had wondered much that night of June at the listless manner and listless playing of Carmen Barbille. For a woman of such spirit and fire it would seem as though she must be in ill-health to play like that. Yet when he looked at her he saw only the comeliness of a woman whom the life of the haut habitant had not destroyed or, indeed, dimmed. Her skin was smooth, she had no wrinkles, and her neck was a pillar of softly moulded white flesh, around which a man might well string unset jewels, if he had them; for the tint and purity of her skin would be a better setting than platinum or fine gold. But the Clerk of the Court was really unsophisticated, or he would have seen that Carmen played the guitar badly because she was not interested in Jean Jacques' singing. He would have known that she had come to that stage in her married life when the tenure is pitifully insecure. He would have seen that the crisis was near. If he had had any real observation he would have noticed that Carmen's eyes at once kindled, and that the guitar became a different thing, when M. Colombin, the young schoolmaster, one of the guests, caught up the refrain of *A la Claire Fontaine*, and in a soft tenor voice sang it with Jean Jacques to the end, and then sang it again with Zoe.

Then Carmen's dark eyes deepened with the gathering light in them, her body seemed to vibrate and thrill with emotion; and when M. Colombin and Zoe ceased, with her eyes fixed on the distance, and as though unconscious of them all, she began to sing a song of Cadiz which she had not sung since boarding the Antoine at Bordeaux. Her mind had, suddenly flown back out of her dark discontent to the days when all life was before her, and, with her Gonzales, she had moved in an atmosphere of romance, adventure and passion.

In a second she was transformed from the wife of the brown money-master to the girl she was when she came to St. Saviour's from the plaza, where her Carvillho Gonzales was shot, with love behind her and memory blazoned in the red of martyrdom. She sang now as she had not sung for some years. Her guitar seemed to leap into life, her face shone with the hot passion of memory, her voice rang with the pain of a disappointed life:

"Granada, Granada, thy gardens are gay,
And bright are thy stars, the high stars above;
But as flowers that fade and are gray,
But as dusk at the end of the day,
Are ye to the light in the eyes of my love
In the eyes, in the soul, of my love.

"Granada, Granada, oh, when shall I see
My love in thy gardens, there waiting for me?"

"Beloved, beloved, have pity, and make
Not the sun shut its eyes, its hot, envious eyes,
And the world in the darkness of night
Be debtor to thee for its light.
Turn thy face, turn thy face from the skies
To the love, to the pain in my eyes.

"Granada, Granada, oh, when shall I see
My love in thy gardens, there waiting for me!"

From that night forward she had been restless and petulant and like one watching and waiting. It seemed to her that she must fly from the life which was choking her. It was all so petty and so small. People went about sneaking into other people's homes like detectives; they turned yellow and grew scrofulous from too much salt pork, green tea, native tobacco, and the heat of feather beds. The making of a rag carpet was an event, the birth of a baby every year till the woman was forty-five was a commonplace; but the exit of a youth to a seminary to become a priest, or the entrance to the novitiate of a young girl, were matters as important as a battle to Napoleon the Great.

How had she gone through it all so long, she asked herself? The presence of Jean Jacques had become almost unbearable when, the day done, he retired to the feather bed which she loathed, though he would have looked upon discarding it like the abdication of his social position. A feather bed was a sign of social position; it was as much the dais to his honour as is the woolsack to the Lord Chancellor in the House of Lords.

She was waiting for something. There was a restless, vagrant spirit alive in her now. She had been so long inactive, tied by the leg, with wings clipped; now her mind roamed into pleasant places of the imagination where life had freedom, where she could renew the impulses of youth. A true philosopher—a man of the world—would have known for

what she was waiting with that vague, disordered expectancy and yearning; but there was no man of the world to watch and guide her this fateful summer, when things began to go irretrievably wrong.

Then George Masson came. He was a man of the world in his way; he saw and knew better than the philosopher of the Manor Cartier. He grasped the situation with the mind of an artist in his own sphere, and with the knowledge got by experience. Thus there had been the thing which the Clerk of the Court saw from Mont Violet behind the Manor; and so it was that as Jean Jacques helped Carmen down from the red wagon on their return from Vilray, she gave him a smile which was meant to deceive; for though given to him it was really given to another man in her mind's eye. At sunset she gave it again to George Masson on the river-bank, only warmer and brighter still, with eyes that were burning, with hands that trembled, and with an agitated bosom more delicately ample than it was on the day the Antoine was wrecked.

Neither of these two adventurers into a wild world of feeling noticed that a man was sitting on a little knoll under a tree, not far away from their meeting-place, busy with pencil and paper.

It was Jean Jacques, who had also come to the river-bank to work out a business problem which must be settled on the morrow. He had stolen out immediately after supper from neighbours who wished to see him, and had come here by a roundabout way, because he wished to be alone.

George Masson and Carmen were together for a few moments only, but Jean Jacques heard his wife say, "Yes, to-morrow--for sure," and then he saw her kiss the master-carpenter--kiss him twice, thrice. After which they vanished, she in one direction, and the invader and marauder in another.

If either of these two had seen the face of the man with a pencil and paper under the spreading beechtree, they would not have been so impatient for tomorrow, and Carmen would not have said "for sure."

Jean Jacques was awake at last, man as well as philosopher.

CHAPTER VIII

THE GATE IN THE WALL

Jean Jacques was not without originality of a kind, and not without initiative; but there were also the elements of the very old Adam in him, and the strain of the obvious. If he had been a real genius, rather than a mere lively variation of the commonplace--a chicken that could never burst its shell, a bird which could not quite break into song--he might have made his biographer guess hard and futilely, as to what he would do after having seen his wife's arms around the neck of another man than himself--a man little more than a manual labourer, while he, Jean Jacques Barbille, had come of the people of the Old Regime. As it was, this magnate of St. Saviour's, who yesterday posed so sympathetically and effectively in the Court at Vilray as a figure of note, did the quite obvious thing: he determined to kill the master-carpenter from Laplatte.

There was no genius in that. When, from under the spreading beech-tree, Jean Jacques saw his wife footing it back to her house with a light,

wayward step; when he watched the master-carpenter vault over a stone fence five feet high with a smile of triumph mingled with doubt on his face, he was too stunned at first to move or speak. If a sledge-hammer strikes you on the skull, though your skull is of such a hardness that it does not break, still the shock numbs activity for awhile, at any rate. The sledge-hammer had descended on Jean Jacques' head, and also had struck him between the eyes; and it is in the credit balance of his ledger of life, that he refrained from useless outcry at the moment. Such a stroke kills some men, either at once, or by lengthened torture; others it sends mad, so that they make a clamour which draws the attention of the astonished and not sympathetic world; but it only paralysed Jean Jacques. For a time he sat fascinated by the ferocity of the event, his eyes following the hurrying wife and the jaunty, swaggering master-carpenter with a strange, animal-like dismay and apprehension. They remained fixed with a kind of blank horror and distraction on the landscape for some time after both had disappeared.

At last, however, he seemed to recover his senses, and to come back from the place where he had been struck by the hammer of treachery. He seemed to realize again that he was still a part of the common world, not a human being swung through the universe on his heart-strings by a Gorgon.

The paper and pencil in his hand brought him back from the far Gehenna where he had been, to the world again--how stony and stormy a world it was, with the air gone as heavy as lead, with his feet so loaded down with chains that he could not stir! He had had great joy of this his world; he had found it a place where every day were problems to be solved by an astute mind, problems which gave way before the master-thinker. There was of course unhappiness in his world. There was death, there was accident occasionally--had his own people not gone down under the scythe of time? But in going they had left behind in real estate and other things good compensation for their loss. There was occasional suffering and poverty and trouble in his little kingdom; but a cord of wood here, a barrel of flour there, a side of beef elsewhere, a little debt remitted, a bag of dried apples, or an Indian blanket--these he gave, and had great pleasure in giving; and so the world was not a place where men should hang their heads, but a place where the busy man got more than the worth of his money.

It had never occurred to him that he was ever translating the world into terms of himself, that he went on his way saying in effect, "I am coming. I am Jean Jacques Barbille. You have heard of me. You know me. Wave a hand to me, duck your head to me, crack the whip or nod when I pass. I am M'sieu' Jean Jacques, philosopher."

And all the while he had only been vaguely, not really, conscious of his wife and child. He did not know that he had only made of his wife an incident in his life, in spite of the fact that he thought he loved her; that he had been proud of her splendid personality; and that, with passionate chivalry, he had resented any criticism of her.

He thought still, as he did on the Antoine, that Carmen's figure had the lines of the Venus of Milo, that her head would have been a model either for a Madonna, or for Joan of Arc, or the famous Isabella of Aragon. Having visited the Louvre and the Luxembourg all in one day, he felt he was entitled to make such comparisons, and that in making them he was on sure ground. He had loved to kiss Carmen in the neck, it was so full and soft and round; and when she went about the garden with her dress shortened, and he saw her ankles, even after he had been married thirteen

years, and she was thirty-four, he still admired, he still thought that the world was a good place when it produced such a woman. And even when she had lashed him with her tongue, as she did sometimes, he still laughed--after the smart was over--because he liked spirit. He would never have a horse that had not some blood, and he had never driven a sluggard in his life more than once. But wife and child and world, and all that therein was, existed largely because they were necessary to Jean Jacques.

That is the way it had been; and it was as though the firmament had been rolled up before his eyes, exposing the everlasting mysteries, when he saw his wife in the arms of the master-carpenter. It was like some frightening dream.

The paper and pencil waked him to reality. He looked towards his house, he looked the way George Masson had gone, and he knew that what he had seen was real life and not a dream. The paper fell from his hand. He did not pick it up. Its fall represented the tumbling walls of life, was the earthquake which shook his world into chaos. He ground the sheet into the gravel with his heel. There would be no cheese-factory built at St. Saviour's for many a year to come. The man of initiative, the man of the hundred irons would not have the hundred and one, or keep the hundred hot any more; because he would be so busy with the iron which had entered into his soul.

When the paper had been made one with the earth, a problem buried for ever, Jean Jacques pulled himself up to his full height, as though facing a great thing which he must do.

"Well, of course!" he said firmly.

That was what his honour, Judge Carcasson, had said a few hours before, when the little Clerk of the Court had remarked an obvious thing about the case of Jean Jacques.

And Jean Jacques said only the obvious thing when he made up his mind to do the obvious thing--to kill George Masson, the master-carpenter.

This was evidence that he was no genius. Anybody could think of killing a man who had injured him, as the master-carpenter had done Jean Jacques. It is the solution of the problem of the Patagonian. It is old as Rameses.

Yet in his own way Jean Jacques did what he felt he had to do. The thing he was going to do was hopelessly obvious, but the doing of it was Jean Jacques' own; and it was not obvious; and that perhaps was genius after all. There are certain inevitable things to do, and for all men to do; and they have been doing them from the beginning of time; but the way it is done--is not that genius? There is no new story in the world; all the things that happen have happened for untold centuries; but the man who tells the story in a new way, that is genius, so the great men say. If, then, Jean Jacques did the thing he had to do with a turn of his own, he would justify to some degree the opinion he had formed of himself.

As he walked back to his desecrated home he set himself to think. How should it be done? There was the rifle with which he had killed deer in the woods beyond the Saguenay and bear beyond the Chicoutimi. That was simple--and it was obvious; and it could be done at once. He could soon overtake the man who had spoiled the world for him.

Yet he was a Norman, and the Norman thinks before he acts. He is the soul of caution; he wants to get the best he can out of his bargain. He will throw nothing away that is to his advantage. There should be other ways than the gun with which to take a man's life--ways which might give a Norman a chance to sacrifice only one life; to secure punishment where it was due, but also escape from punishment for doing the obvious thing.

Poison? That was too stupid even to think of once. A pitch-fork and a dung-heap? That had its merits; but again there was the risk of more than one life.

All the way to his house, Jean Jacques, with something of the rage of passion and the glaze of horror gone from his eyes, and his face not now so ghastly, still brooded over how, after he had had his say, he was to put George Masson out of the world. But it did not come at once. All makers of life-stories find their difficulty at times. Tirelessly they grope along a wall, day in, day out, and then suddenly a great gate swings open, as though to the touch of a spring, and the whole way is clear to the goal.

Jean Jacques went on thinking in a strange, new, intense abstraction. His restless eyes were steadier than they had ever been; his wife noticed that as he entered the house after the Revelation. She noticed also his paleness and his abstraction. For an instant she was frightened; but no, Jean Jacques could not know anything. Yet--yet he had come from the direction of the river!

"What is it, Jean Jacques?" she asked. "Aren't you well?"

He put his hand to his head, but did not look her in the eyes. His gesture helped him to avoid that. "I have a head--la, such a head! I have been thinking, thinking-it is my hobby. I have been planning the cheese-factory, and all at once it comes on-the ache in my head. I will go to bed. Yes, I will go at once." Suddenly he turned at the door leading to the bedroom. "The little Zoe--is she well?"

"Of course. Why should she not be well? She has gone to the top of the hill. Of course, she's well, Jean Jacques."

"Good-good!" he remarked. Somehow it seemed strange to him that Zoe should be well. Was there not a terrible sickness in his house, and had not that woman, his wife, her mother, brought the infection? Was he himself not stricken by it?

Carmen was calm enough again. "Go to bed, Jean Jacques," she said, "and I'll bring you a sleeping posset. I know those headaches. You had one when the ash-factory was burned."

He nodded without looking at her, and closed the door behind him.

When she came to the bedroom a half-hour later, his face was turned to the wall. She spoke, but he did not answer. She thought he was asleep. He was not asleep. He was only thinking how to do the thing which was not obvious, which was also safe for himself. That should be his triumph, if he could but achieve it.

When she came to bed he did not stir, and he did not answer her when she spoke.

"The poor Jean Jacques!" he heard her say, and if there had not been on him the same courage that possessed him the night when the Antoine was wrecked, he would have sobbed.

He did not stir. He kept thinking; and all the time her words, "The poor Jean Jacques!" kept weaving themselves through his vague designs. Why had she said that--she who had deceived, betrayed him? Had he then seen what he had seen?

She did not sleep for a long time, and when she did it was uneasily. But the bed was an immense one, and she was not near him. There was no sleep for him--not even for an hour. Once, in exhaustion, he almost rolled over into the poppies of unconsciousness; but he came back with a start and a groan to sentient life again, and kept feeling, feeling along the wall of purpose for a masterly way to kill.

At dawn it came, suddenly spreading out before him like a picture. He saw himself standing at the head of the flume out there by the Mill Cartier with his hand on the lever. Below him in the empty flume was the master-carpenter giving a last inspection to the repairs. Beyond the master-carpenter--far beyond--was the great mill-wheel! Behind himself, Jean Jacques, was the river held back by the dam; and if the lever was opened,--the river would sweep through the raised gates down the flume to the millwheel--with the man. And then the wheel would turn and turn, and the man would be in the wheel.

It was not obvious; it was original; and it looked safe for Jean Jacques. How easily could such an "accident" occur!

CHAPTER IX

"MOI-JE SUIS PHILOSOPHE"

The air was like a mellow wine, and the light on the landscape was full of wistfulness. It was a thing so exquisite that a man of sentiment like Jean Jacques in his younger days would have wept to see. And the feeling was as palpable as the seeing; as in the early spring the new life which is being born in the year, produces a febrile kind of sorrow in the mind. But the glow of Indian summer, that compromise, that after-thought of real summer, which brings her back for another good-bye ere she vanishes for ever--its sadness is of a different kind. Its longing has a sharper edge; there stir in it the pangs of discontent; and the mind and body yearn for solace. It is a dangerous time, even more dangerous than spring for those who have passed the days of youth.

It had proved dangerous to Carmen Barbille. The melancholy of the gorgeously tinted trees, the flights of the birds to the south, the smell of the fallow field, the wind with the touch of the coming rains--these had given to a growing discontent with her monotonous life the desire born of self-pity. In spite of all she could do she was turning to the life she had left behind in Cadiz long ago.

It seemed to her that Jean Jacques had ceased to care for the charms which once he had so proudly proclaimed. There was in her the strain of the religion of Epicurus. She desired always that her visible corporeal

self should be admired and desired, that men should say, "What a splendid creature!" It was in her veins, an undefined philosophy of life; and she had ever measured the love of Jean Jacques by his caresses. She had no other vital standard. This she could measure, she could grasp it and say, "Here I have a hold; it is so much harvested." But if some one had written her a poem a thousand verses long, she would have said, "Yes, all very fine, but let me see what it means; let me feel that it is so."

She had an inherent love of luxury and pleasure, which was far more active in her now than when she married Jean Jacques. For a Spanish woman she had matured late; and that was because, in her youth, she had been active and athletic, unlike most Spanish girls; and the microbes of a sensuous life, or what might have become a sensual life, had not good chance to breed.

It all came, however, in the dullness of the winter days and nights, in the time of deep snows, when they could go abroad but very little. Then her body and her mind seemed to long for the indolent sun-spaces of Spain. The artificial heat of the big stoves in the rooms with the low ceilings only irritated her, and she felt herself growing more ample from lassitude of the flesh. This particular autumn it seemed to her that she could not get through another winter without something going wrong, without a crisis of some sort. She felt the need of excitement, of change. She had the desire for pleasures undefined.

Then George Masson came, and the undefined took form almost at once. It was no case of the hunter pursuing his prey with all the craft and subtlety of his trade. She had answered his look with spontaneity, due to the fact that she had been surprised into the candour of her feelings by the appearance of one who had the boldness of a brigand, the health of a Hercules, and the intelligence of a primitive Jesuit. He had not hesitated; he had yielded himself to the sumptuous attraction, and the fire in his eyes was only the window of the furnace within him. He had gone headlong to the conquest, and by sheer force of temperament and weight of passion he had swept her off her feet.

He had now come to the last day of his duty at the Mill Cartier, when all he had to do was to inspect the work done, give assurance and guarantee that it was all right, and receive his cheque from Jean Jacques. He had come early, because he had been unable to sleep well, and also he had much to do before keeping his tryst with Carmen Barbille in the afternoon.

As he passed the Manor Cartier this fateful morning, he saw her at the window, and he waved his hat at her with a cheery salutation which she did not hear. He knew that she did not hear or see. "My beauty !" he said aloud. "My splendid girl, my charmer of Cadiz! My wonder of the Alhambra, my Moorish maid! My bird of freedom--hand of Charlemagne, your lips are sweet, yes, sweet as one-and-twenty!"

His lips grew redder at the thought of the kisses he had taken, his cheek flushed with the thought of those he meant to take; and he laughed greedily as he lowered himself into the flume by a ladder, just under the lever that opened the gates, to begin his inspection.

It was not a perfunctory inspection, for he was a good craftsman, and he had pride in what his workmen did.

"Ah!"

It was a sound of dumbfounded amazement, a hoarse cry of horror which was not in tune with the beauty of the morning.

"Ah!"

It came from his throat like the groan of a trapped and wounded lion. George Masson had almost finished his inspection, when he heard a noise behind him. He turned and looked back. There stood Jean Jacques with his hand on the lever. The noise he had heard was the fourteen-foot ladder being dropped, after Jean Jacques had drawn it up softly out of the flume.

"Ah! Nom de Dieu!" George Masson exclaimed again in helpless fury and with horror in his eyes.

By instinct he understood that Carmen's husband knew all. He realized what Jean Jacques meant to do. He knew that the lever locking the mill-wheel had been opened, and that Jean Jacques had his hand on the lever which raised the gate of the flume.

By instinct--for there was no time for thought--he did the only thing which could help him, he made a swift gesture to Jean Jacques, a gesture that bade him wait. Time was his only friend in this--one minute, two minutes, three minutes, anything. For if the gates were opened, he would be swept into the millwheel, and there would be the end--the everlasting end.

"Wait!" he called out after his gesture. "One second!"

He ran forward till he was about thirty feet from Jean Jacques standing there above him, with the set face and the dark malicious, half-insane eyes. Even in his fear and ghastly anxiety, the subconscious mind of George Masson was saying, "He looks like the Baron of Beaugard--like the Baron of Beaugard that killed the man who abused his wife."

It was so. Great-great-grand-nephew of the Baron of Beaugard as he was, Jean Jacques looked like the portrait of him which hung in the Manor Cartier. "Wait--but wait one minute!" exclaimed George Masson; and now, all at once, he had grown cool and determined, and his brain was at work again with an activity and a clearness it had never known. He had gained one minute of time, he might be able to gain more. In any case, no one could save him except himself. There was Jean Jacques with his hand on the lever--one turn and the thing was done for ever. If a rescuer was even within one foot of Jean Jacques, the deed could still be done. It was so much easier opening than shutting the gates of the flume!

"Why should I wait, devil and rogue?" The words came from Jean Jacques' lips with a snarl. "I am going to kill you. It will do you no good to whine--cochon!"

To call a man a pig is the worst insult which could be offered by one man to another in the parish of St. Saviour's. To be called a pig as you are going to die, is an offensive business indeed.

"I know you are going to kill me--that you can kill me, and I can do nothing," was the master-carpenter's reply. "There it is--a turn of the lever, and I am done. Bien sur, I know how easy! I do not want to die, but I will not squeal even if I am a pig. One can only die once. And

once is enough . . . No, don't--not yet ! Give me a minute till I tell you something; then you can open the gates. You will have a long time to live--yes, yes, you are the kind that live long. Well, a minute or two is not much to ask. If you want to murder, you will open the gates at once; but if it is punishment, if you are an executioner, you will give me time to pray."

Jean Jacques did not soften. His voice was harsh and grim. "Well, get on with your praying, but don't talk. You are going to die," he added, his hands gripping the lever tighter.

The master-carpenter had had the true inspiration in his hour of danger. He had touched his appeal with logic, he had offered an argument. Jean Jacques was a logician, a philosopher! That point made about the difference between a murder and an execution was a good one. Beside it was an acknowledgment, by inference, from his victim, that he was getting what he deserved.

"Pray quick and have it over, pig of an adulterer!" added Jean Jacques.

The master-carpenter raised a protesting hand. "There you are mistaken; but it is no matter. At the end of to-day I would have been an adulterer, if you hadn't found out. I don't complain of the word. But see, as a philosopher"--Jean Jacques jerked a haughty assent--"as a philosopher you will want to know how and why it is. Carmen will never tell you--a woman never tells the truth about such things, because she does not know how. She does not know the truth ever, exactly, about anything. It is because she is a woman. But I would like to tell you the exact truth; and I can, because I am a man. For what she did you are as much to blame as she . . . no, no--not yet!"

Jean Jacques' hand had spasmodically tightened on the lever as though he would wrench the gates open, and a snarl came from his lips.

"Figure de Christ, but it is true, as true as death! Listen, M'sieu' Jean Jacques. You are going to kill me, but listen so that you will know how to speak to her afterwards, understanding what I said as I died."

"Get on--quick!" growled Jean Jacques with white wrinkled lips and the sun in his agonized eyes. George Masson continued his pleading. "You were always a man of mind"--Jean Jacques' fierce agitation visibly subsided, and a surly sort of vanity crept into his face--"and you married a girl who cared more for what you did than what you thought--that is sure, for I know women. I am not married, and I have had much to do with many of them. I will tell you the truth. I left the West because of a woman--of two women. I had a good business, but I could not keep out of trouble with women. They made it too easy for me."

"Peacock-pig!" exclaimed Jean Jacques with an ugly sneer.

"Let a man when he is dying tell all the truth, to ease his mind," said the master-carpenter with a machiavellian pretence and cunning. "It was vanity, it was, as you say; it was the peacock in me made me be the friend of many women and not the husband of one. I came down here to Quebec from the Far West to get away from consequences. It was expensive. I had to sacrifice. Well, here I am in trouble again--my last trouble, and with the wife of a man that I respect and admire, not enough to keep my hands off his wife, but still that I admire. It is my weakness that I could not be, as a man, honourable to Jean Jacques

Barbille. And so I pay the price; so I have to go without time to make my will. Bless heaven above, I have no wife--"

"If you had a wife you would not be dying now. You would not then meddle with the home of Jean Jacques Barbille," sneered Jean Jacques. The note was savage yet.

"Ah, for sure, for sure! It is so. And if I lived I would marry at once."

Desperate as his condition was, the master-carpenter could almost have laughed at the idea of marriage preventing him from following the bent of his nature. He was the born lover. If he had been as high as the Czar, or as low as the ditcher, he would have been the same; but it would be madness to admit that to Jean Jacques now.

"But, as you say, let me get on. My time has come--"

Jean Jacques jerked his head angrily. "Enough of this. You keep on saying 'Wait a little,' but your time has come. Now take it so, and don't repeat."

"A man must get used to the idea of dying, or he will die hard," replied the master-carpenter, for he saw that Jean Jacques' hands were not so tightly clenched on the lever now; and time was everything. He had already been near five minutes, and every minute was a step to a chance of escape--somehow.

"I said you were to blame," he continued. "Listen, Jean Jacques Barbille. You, a man of mind, married a girl who cared more for a touch of your hand than a bucketful of your knowledge, which every man in the province knows is great. At first you were almost always thinking of her and what a fine woman she was, and because everyone admired her, you played the peacock, too. I am not the only peacock. You are a good man--no one ever said anything against your character. But always, always, you think most of yourself. It is everywhere you go as if you say, 'Look out. I am coming. I am Jean Jacques Barbille.'

"Make way for Jean Jacques. I am from the Manor Cartier. You have heard of me.' . . . That is the way you say things in your mind. But all the time the people say, 'That is Jean Jacques Barbille, but you should see his wife. She is a wonder. She is at home at the Manor with the cows and the geese. Jean Jacques travels alone through the parish to Quebec, to Three Rivers, to Tadousac, to the great exhibition at Montreal, but madame, she stays at home. M'sieu' Jean Jacques is nothing beside her'--that is what the people say. They admire you for your brains, but they would have fallen down before your wife, if you had given her half a chance."

"Ah, that's bosh--what do you know!" exclaimed Jean Jacques fiercely, but he was fascinated too by the argument of the man whose life he was going to take.

"I know the truth, my money-man. Do you think she'd have looked at me if you'd been to her what she thought I might be? No, bien sur! Did you take her where she could see the world? No. Did you bring her presents? No. Did you say, 'Come along, we will make a little journey to see the world?' No. Do you think that a woman can sit and darn your socks, and tidy your room, and bake you pancakes in the morning while you roast your

toes, and be satisfied with just that, and not long for something outside?"

Jean Jacques was silent. He did not move. He was being hypnotized by a mind of subtle strength, by the logic of which he was so great a lover.

The master-carpenter pressed his logic home. "No, she must sit in your shadow always. She must wait till you come. And when you come, it was 'Here am I, your Jean Jacques. Fall down and worship me. I am your husband.' Did you ever say, 'Heavens, there you are, the woman of all the world, the rising and the setting sun, the star that shines, the garden where all the flowers of love grow'? Did you ever do that? But no, there was only one person in the world--there was only you, Jean Jacques. You were the only pig in the sty."

It was a bold stroke, but if Jean Jacques could stand that, he could stand anything. There was a savage start on the part of Jean Jacques, and the lever almost moved.

"Stop one second!" cried the master-carpenter, sharply now, for in spite of the sudden savagery on Jean Jacques' part, he felt he had an advantage, and now he would play his biggest card.

"You can kill me. It is there in your hand. No one can stop you. But will that give you anything? What is my life? If you take it away, will you be happier? It is happiness you want. Your wife--she will love you, if you give her a chance. If you kill me, I will have my revenge in death, for it is the end of all things for you. You lose your wife for ever. You need not do so. She would have gone with me, not because of me, but because I was a man who she thought would treat her like a friend, like a comrade; who would love her--sacre, what husband could help make love to such a woman, unless he was in love with himself instead of her!"

Jean Jacques rocked to and fro over the lever in his agitation, yet he made no motion to move it. He was under a spell.

Straight home drove the master-carpenter's reasoning now. "Kill me, and you lose her for ever. Kill me, and she will hate you. You think she will not find out? Then see: as I die I will shriek out so loud that she can hear me, and she will understand. She will go mad, and give you over to the law. And then--and then! Did you ever think what will become of your child, of your Zoe, if you go to the gallows? That would be your legacy and your blessing to her--the death of a murderer; and she would be left alone with the woman that would hate you in death! Voila--do you not see?"

Jean Jacques saw. The terrific logic of the thing smote him. His wife hating him, himself on the scaffold, his little Zoe disgraced and dishonoured all her life; and himself out of it all, unable to help her, and bringing irremediable trouble on her! As a chemical clears a muddy liquid, leaving it pure and atomless, so there seemed to pass over Jean Jacques' face a thought like a revelation.

He took his hand from the lever. For a moment he stood like one awakened out of a sleep. He put his hands to his eyes, then shook his head as though to free it of some hateful burden. An instant later he stooped, lifted up the ladder beside him, and let it down to the floor of the flume.

"There, go--for ever," he said.

Then he turned away with bowed head. He staggered as he stepped down from the bridge of the flume, where the lever was. He swayed from side to side. Then he raised his head and looked towards his house. His child lived there--his Zoe.

"Moi je suis philosophe !" he said brokenly.

After a moment or two, as he stumbled on, he said it again--"Me, I am a philosopher!"

CHAPTER X

"QUIEN SABE"--WHO KNOWS!

This much must be said for George Masson, that after the terrible incident at the flume he would have gone straight to the Manor Cartier to warn Carmen, if it had been possible, though perhaps she already knew. But there was Jean Jacques on his way back to the Manor, and nothing remained but to proceed to Laplatte, and give the woman up for ever. He had no wish to pull up stakes again and begin life afresh, though he was only forty, and he had plenty of initiative left. But if he had to go, he would want to go alone, as he had done before. Yes, he would have liked to tell Carmen that Jean Jacques knew everything; but it was impossible. She would have to face the full shock from Jean Jacques' own battery. But then again perhaps she knew already. He hoped she did.

At the very moment that Masson was thinking this, while he went to the main road where he had left his horse and buggy tied up, Carmen came to know.

Carmen had not seen her husband that morning until now. She had waked late, and when she was dressed and went into the dining-room to look for him, with an apprehension which was the reflection of the bad dreams of the night, she found that he had had his breakfast earlier than usual and had gone to the mill. She also learned that he had eaten very little, and that he had sent a man into Vilray for something or other. Try as she would to stifle her anxiety, it obtruded itself, and she could eat no breakfast. She kept her eyes on the door and the window, watching for Jean Jacques.

Yet she reproved herself for her stupid concern, for Jean Jacques would have spoken last night, if he had discovered anything. He was not the man to hold his tongue when he had a chance of talking. He would be sure to make the most of any opportunity for display of intellectual emotion, and he would have burst his buttons if he had known. That was the way she put it in a vernacular which was not Andalusian. Such men love a grievance, because it gives them an opportunity to talk--with a good case and to some point, not into the air at imaginary things, as she had so often seen Jean Jacques do. She knew her Jean Jacques. That is, she thought she knew her Jean Jacques after living with him for over thirteen years; but hers was a very common mistake. It is not time which gives revelation, or which turns a character inside out, and exposes a new and amazing, maybe revolting side to it. She had never really seen Jean

Jacques, and he had never really seen himself, as he was, but only as circumstances made him seem to be. What he had showed of his nature all these forty odd years was only the ferment of a more or less shallow life, in spite of its many interests: but here now at last was life, with the crust broken over a deep well of experience and tragedy. She knew as little what he would do in such a case as he himself knew beforehand. As the incident of the flume just now showed, he knew little indeed, for he had done exactly the opposite of what he meant to do. It was possible that Carmen would also do exactly the opposite of what she meant to do in her own crisis.

Her test was to come. Would she, after all, go off with the master-carpenter, leaving behind her the pretty, clever, volatile Zoe. . . . Zoe--ah, where was Zoe? Carmen became anxious about Zoe, she knew not why. Was it the revival of the maternal instinct?

She was told that Zoe had gone off on her pony to take a basket of good things to a poor old woman down the river three miles away. She would be gone all morning. By so much, fate was favouring her; for the child's presence would but heighten the emotion of her exit from that place where her youth had been wasted. Already the few things she had meant to take away were secreted in a safe place some distance from the house, beside the path she meant to take when she left Jean Jacques for ever. George Masson wanted her, they were to meet to-day, and she was going--going somewhere out of this intolerable dullness and discontent.

When she pushed her coffee-cup aside and rose from the table without eating, she went straight to her looking-glass and surveyed herself with a searching eye. Certainly she was young enough (she said to herself) to draw the eyes of those who cared for youth and beauty. There was not a grey hair in the dark brown of her head, there was not a wrinkle--yes, there were two at the corners of her mouth, which told the story of her restlessness, of her hunger for the excitement of which she had been deprived all these years. To go back to Cadiz?--oh, anywhere, anywhere, so that her blood could beat faster; so that she could feel the stir of life which had made her spirit flourish even in the dangers of the far-off day when Gonzales was by her side.

She looked at her guitar. She was sorry she could not take that away with her. But Jean Jacques would, no doubt, send it after her with his curse. She would love to play it once again with the old thrill; with the thrill she had felt on the night of Zoe's birthday a little while ago, when she was back again with her lover and the birds in the gardens of Granada. She would sing to someone who cared to hear her, and to someone who would make her care to sing, which was far more important. She would sing to the master-carpenter. Though he had not asked her to go with him--only to meet in a secret place in the hills--she meant to do so, just as she once meant to marry Jean Jacques, and had done so. It was true she would probably not have married Jean Jacques, if it had not been for the wreck of the Antoine; but the wreck had occurred, and she had married him, and that was done and over so far as she was concerned. She had determined to go away with the master-carpenter, and though he might feel the same hesitation as that which Jean Jacques had shown--she had read her Norman aright aboard the Antoine--yet, still, George Masson should take her away. A catastrophe had thrown Jean Jacques into her arms; it would not be a catastrophe which would throw the master-carpenter into her arms. It would be that they wanted each other.

The mirror gave her a look of dominance--was it her regular features and

her classic head? Does beauty in itself express authority, just because it has the transcendent thing in it? Does the perfect form convey something of the same thing that physical force--an army in arms, a battleship--conveys? In any case it was there, that inherent masterfulness, though not in its highest form. She was not an aristocrat, she was no daughter of kings, no duchess of Castile, no dona of Segovia; and her beauty belonged to more primary manifestations; but it was above the lower forms, even if it did not reach to the highest. "A handsome even splendid woman of her class" would have been the judgment of the connoisseur.

As she looked in the glass at her clear skin, at the wonderful throat showing so soft and palpable and tower-like under the black velvet ribbon brightened by a paste ornament; as she saw the smooth breadth of brow, the fulness of the lips, the limpid lustre of the large eyes, the well-curved ear, so small and so like ivory, it came home to her, as it had never done before, that she was wasted in this obscure parish of St. Saviour's.

There was not a more restless soul or body in all the hemisphere than the soul and body of Carmen Barbille, as she went from this to that on the morning when Jean Jacques had refrained from killing the soul-disturber, the master-carpenter, who had with such skill destroyed the walls and foundations of his home. Carmen was pointlessly busy as she watched for the return of Jean Jacques.

At last she saw him coming from the flume of the mill! She saw that he stumbled as he walked, and that, every now and then, he lifted his head with an effort and threw it back, and threw his shoulders back also, as though to assert his physical manhood. He wore no hat, his hands were making involuntary gestures of helplessness. But presently he seemed to assert authority over his fumbling body and to come erect. His hands clenched at his sides, his head came up stiffly and stayed, and with quickened footsteps he marched rigidly forward towards the Manor.

Then she guessed at the truth, and as soon as she saw his face she was sure beyond peradventure that he knew.

His figure darkened the doorway. Her first thought was to turn and flee, not because she was frightened of what he would do, but because she did not wish to hear what he would say. She shrank from the uprolling of the curtain of the last thirteen years, from the grim exposure of the nakedness of their life together. Her indolent nature in repose wanted the dust of existence swept into a corner out of sight; yet when she was roused, and there were no corners into which the dust could be swept, she could be as bold as any better woman.

She hesitated till it was too late to go, and then as he entered the house from the staring sunlight and the peace of the morning, she straightened herself, and a sulky, stubborn look came into her eyes. He might try to kill her, but she had seen death in many forms far away in Spain, and she would not be afraid till there was cause. Imagination would not take away her courage. She picked up a half-knitted stocking which lay upon the table, and standing there, while he came into the middle of the room, she began to ply the needles.

He stood still. Her face was bent over her knitting. She did not look at him.

"Well, why don't you look at me?" he asked in a voice husky with passion.

She raised her head and looked straight into his dark, distracted eyes.

"Good morning," she said calmly.

A kind of snarling laugh came to his lips. "I said good morning to my wife yesterday, but I will not say it to-day. What is the use of saying good morning, when the morning is not good!"

"That's logical, anyhow," she said, her needles going faster now. She was getting control of them--and of herself.

"Why isn't the morning good? Speak. Why isn't it good, Carmen?"

"Quien sabe--who knows!" she replied with exasperating coolness.

"I know--I know all; and it is enough for a lifetime," he challenged.

"What do you know--what is the 'all'?" Her voice had lost timbre. It was suddenly weak, but from suspense and excitement rather than from fear.

"I saw you last night with him, by the river. I saw what you did. I heard you say, 'Yes, to-morrow, for sure.' I saw what you did."

Her eyes were busy with the knitting now. She did not know what to say. Then, he had known all since the night before! He knew it when he pretended that his head ached--knew it as he lay by her side all night. He knew it, and said nothing! But what had he done--what had he done? She waited for she knew not what. George Masson was to come and inspect the flume early that morning. Had he come? She had not seen him. But the river was flowing through the flume: she could hear the mill-wheel turning--she could hear the mill-wheel turning!

As she did not speak, with a curious husky shrillness to his voice he said: "There he was down in the flume, there was I at the lever above, there was the mill-wheel unlocked. There it was. I gripped the lever, and--"

Her great eyes stared with horror. The knitting-needles stopped; a pallor swept across her face. She felt as she did when she heard the court-martial sentence Carvillho Gonzales to death.

The mill-wheel sounded louder and louder in her ears.

"You let in the river!" she cried. "You drove him into the wheel--you killed him!"

"What else was there to do?" he demanded. "It had to be done, and it was the safest way. It would be an accident. Such a thing might easily happen."

"You have murdered him!" she gasped with a wild look.

"To call it murder!" he sneered. "Surely my wife would not call it murder."

"Fiend--not to have the courage to fight him!" she flung back at him. "To crawl like a snake and let loose a river on a man! In any other country, he'd have been given a chance."

This was his act in a new light. He had had only one idea in his mind when he planned the act, and that was punishment. What rights had a man who had stolen what was nearer and dearer than a man's own flesh, and for which he would have given his own flesh fifty times? Was it that Carmen would now have him believe he ought to have fought the man, who had spoiled his life and ruined a woman's whole existence.

"What chance had I when he robbed me in the dark of what is worth fifty times my own life to me?" he asked savagely.

"Murderer--murderer!" she cried hoarsely. "You shall pay for this."

"You will tell--you will give me up?"

Her eyes were on the mill and the river . . . "Where--where is he? Has he gone down the river? Did you kill him and let him go--like that!"

She made a flinging gesture, as one would toss a stone.

He stared at her. He had never seen her face like that--so strained and haggard. George Masson was right when he said that she would give him up; that his life would be in danger, and that his child's life would be spoiled.

"Murderer!" she repeated. "And when you go to the gallows, your child's life--you did not think of that, eh? To have your revenge on the man who was no more to blame than I, thinking only of yourself, you killed him; but you did not think of your child."

Ah, yes, surely George Masson was right! That was what he had said about his child, Zoe. What a good thing it was he had not killed the ravager of his home!

But suddenly his logic came to his aid. In terrible misery as he was, he was almost pleased that he could reason. "And you would give me over to the law? You would send me to the gallows--and spoil your child's life?" he retorted.

She threw the knitting down and flung her hands up. "I have no husband. I have no child. Take your life. Take it. I will go and find his body," she said, and she moved swiftly towards the door. "He has gone down the river--I will find him!"

"He has gone up the river," he exclaimed. "Up the river, I say!"

She stopped short and looked at him blankly. Then his meaning became clear to her.

"You did not kill him?" she asked scarce above a whisper.

"I let him go," he replied.

"You did not fight him--why?" There was scorn in her tone.

"And if I had killed him that way?" he asked with terrible logic, as he

thought.

"There was little chance of that," she replied scornfully, and steadied herself against a chair; for, now that the suspense was over, she felt as though she had been passed between stones which ground the strength out of her.

A flush of fierce resentment crossed over his face. "It is not everything to be big," he rejoined. "The greatest men in the world have been small like me, but they have brought the giant things to their feet."

She waved a hand disdainfully. "What are you going to do now?" she asked.

He drew himself up. He seemed to rearrange the motions of his mind with a little of the old vanity, which was at once grotesque and piteous. "I am going to forgive you and to try to put things right," he said. "I have had my faults. You were not to blame altogether. I have left you too much alone. I did not understand everything all through. I had never studied women. If I had I should have done the right thing always. I must begin to study women." The drawn look was going a little from his face, the ghastly pain was fading from his eyes; his heart was speaking for her, while his vain intellect hunted the solution of his problem.

She could scarcely believe her ears. No Spaniard would ever have acted as this man was doing. She had come from a land of No Forgiveness. Carvillho Gonzales would have killed her, if she had been untrue to him; and she would have expected it and understood it.

But Jean Jacques was going to forgive her--going to study women, and so understand her and understand women, as he understood philosophy! This was too fantastic for human reason. She stared at him, unable to say a word, and the distracted look in her face did not lessen. Forgiveness did not solve her problem.

"I am going to take you to Montreal--and then out to Winnipeg, when I've got the cheese-factory going," he said with a wise look in his face, and with tenderness even coming into his eyes. "I know what mistakes I've made"--had not George Masson the despoiler told him of them?--"and I know what a scoundrel that fellow is, and what tricks of the tongue he has. Also he is as sleek to look at as a bull, and so he got a hold on you. I grasp things now. Soon we will start away together again as we did at Gaspé."

He came close to her. "Carmen!" he said, and made as though he would embrace her.

"Wait--wait a little. Give me time to think," she said with dry lips, her heart beating hard. Then she added with a flattery which she knew would tell, "I cannot think quick as you do. I am slow. I must have time. I want to work it all out. Wait till to-night," she urged. "Then we can--"

"Good, we will make it all up to-night," he said, and he patted her shoulder as one would that of a child. It had the slight flavour of the superior and the paternal.

She almost shrank from his touch. If he had kissed her she would have

felt that she must push him away; and yet she also knew how good a man he was.

CHAPTER XI

THE CLERK OF THE COURT KEEPS A PROMISE

"Well, what is it, M'sieu' Fille? What do you want with me? I've got a lot to do before sundown, and it isn't far off. Out with it."

George Masson was in no good humour; from the look on the face of the little Clerk of the Court he had no idea that he would disclose any good news. It was probably some stupid business about "money not being paid into the Court," which had been left over from cases tried and lost; and he had had a number of cases that summer. His head was not so clear to-day as usual, but he had had little difficulties with M'sieu' Fille before, and he was sure that there was something wrong now.

"Do you want to make me a present?" he added with humorous impatience, for though he was not in a good temper, he liked the Clerk of the Court, who was such a figure at Vilray.

The opening for his purpose did not escape M. Fille. He had been at a loss to begin, but here was a natural opportunity for him.

"Well, good advice is not always a present, but I should like mine to be taken as such, monsieur," he said a little oracularly.

"Oh, advice--to give me advice--that's why you've brought me in here, when I've so much to do I can't breathe! Time is money with me, old 'un."

"Mine is advice which may be money in your pocket, monsieur," remarked the Clerk of the Court with meaning. "Money saved is money earned." "How do you mean to save me money--by getting the Judge to give decisions in my favour? That would be money in my pocket for sure. The Court has been running against my interests this year. When I think I was never so right in my life--bang goes the judgment of the Court against me, and into my pocket goes my hand. I don't only need to save money, I need to make it; so if you can help me in that way I'm your man, M'sieu' la Fillette?"

The little man bristled at the misuse of his name, and he flushed slightly also; but there was always something engaging in the pleasure-loving master-carpenter. He had such an eloquent and warm temperament, the atmosphere of his personality was so genial, that his impertinence was insulated. Certainly the master-carpenter was not unpopular, and people could not easily resist the grip of his physical influence, while mentally he was far indeed from being deficient. He looked as little like a villain as a man could, and yet--and yet--a nature like that of George Masson (even the little Clerk could see that) was not capable of being true beyond the minute in which he took his oath of fidelity. While the fit of willingness was on him he would be true; yet in reality there was no truth at all--only self-indulgence unmarked by duty or honour.

"Give me a judgment for defamation of character. Give me a thousand dollars or so for that, m'sieu', and you'll do a good turn to a deserving fellow-citizen and admirer--one little thousand, that's all, m'sieu'. Then I'll dance at your wedding and weep at your tomb--so there!"

How easy he made the way for the little Clerk of the Court! "Defamation of character"--could there possibly be a better opening for what he had promised Judge Carcasson he would say!

"Ah, Monsieur Masson," very officially and decorously replied M. Fille, "but is it defamation of character? If the thing is true, then what is the judgment? It goes against you--so there!" There was irony in the last words.

"If what thing is true?" sharply asked the mastercarpenter, catching at the fringe of the idea in M. Fille's mind. "What thing?"

"Ah, but it is true, for I saw it! Yes, alas! I saw it with my own eyes. By accident of course; but there it was--absolute, uncompromising, deadly and complete."

It was a happy moment for the little Clerk of the Court when he could, in such an impromptu way, coin a phrase, or a set of adjectives, which would bear inspection of purists of the language. He loved to talk, though he did not talk a great deal, but he made innumerable conversations in his mind, and that gave him facility when he did speak. He had made conversations with George Masson in his mind since yesterday, when he gave his promise to Judge Carcasson; but none of them was like the real conversation now taking place. It was all the impression of the moment, while the phrases in his mind had been wonderfully logical things which, from an intellectual standpoint, would have delighted the man whose cause he was now engaged in defending.

"You saw what, M'sieu' la Fillette? Out with it, and don't use such big adjectives. I'm only a carpenter. 'Absolute, uncompromising, deadly, complete'--that's a mouthful of grammar, my lords! Come, my sprig of jurisprudence, tell us what you saw." There was an apparent nervousness in Masson's manner now. Indeed he showed more agitation than when, a few hours before, Jean Jacques had stood with his hand on the lever of the gates of the flume, and the life of the master-carpenter at his feet, to be kicked into eternity.

"Four days ago at five o'clock in the afternoon"--in a voice formal and exact, the little Clerk of the Court seemed to be reading from a paper, since he kept his eyes fixed on the blotter before him, as he did in Court--"I was coming down the hill behind the Manor Cartier, when my attention--by accident--was drawn to a scene below me in the Manor. I stopped short, of course, and--"

"Diable! You stopped short 'of course' before what you saw! Spit it out--what did you see?" George Masson had had a trying day, and there was danger of losing control of himself. There was a whiteness growing round the eyes, and eating up the warmth of the cheek; his admirably smooth brow was contracted into heavy wrinkles, and a foot shifted uneasily on the floor with a scraping sole. This drew the attention of M. Fille, who raised his head reprovingly--he could not get rid of the feeling that he was in court, and that a case was being tried; and the severity of a Judge is naught compared with the severity of a Clerk of the Court, particularly if he is small and unmarried, and has no one to

beat him into manageable humanity.

M. Fille's voice was almost querulous.

"If you will but be patient, monsieur! I saw a man with a woman in his arms, and I fear that I must mention the name of the man. It is not necessary to give the name of the woman, but I have it written here"--he tapped the paper--"and there is no mistake in the identity. The man's name is George Masson, master-carpenter, of the town of Laplatte in the province of Quebec."

George Masson was as one hit between the eyes. He made a motion as though to ward off a blow. "Name of Peter, old cock!" he exclaimed abruptly. "You saw enough certainly, if you saw that, and you needn't mention the lady's name, as you say. The evidence is not merely circumstantial. You saw it with your own eyes, and you are an official of the Court, and have the ear of the Judge, and you look like a saint to a jury. Well for sure, I can't prove defamation of character, as you say. But what then--what do you want?"

"What I want I hope you may be able to grant without demur, monsieur. I want you to give your pledge on the Book"--he laid his hand on a Testament lying on the table--"that you will hold no further communication with the lady."

"Where do you come inhere? What's your standing in the business?" Masson jerked out his words now. The Clerk of the Court made a reproving gesture. "Knowing what I did, what I had seen, it was clear that I must approach one or other of the parties concerned. Out of regard for the lady I could not approach her husband, and so betray her; out of regard for the husband I could not approach himself and destroy his peace; out of regard for all concerned I could not approach the lady's father, for then--"

Masson interrupted with an oath.

"That old reprobate of Cadiz--well no, bagosh!

"And so you whisked me into your office with the talk of urgent business and--"

"Is not the business urgent, monsieur?"

"Not at all," was the sharp reply of the culprit.

"Monsieur, you shock me. Do you consider that your conduct is not criminal? I have here"--he placed his hand on a book--"the Statutes of Victoria, and it lays down with wholesome severity the law concerning the theft of the affection of a wife, with the accompanying penalty, going as high as twenty thousand dollars."

George Masson gasped. Here was a new turn of affairs. But he set his teeth.

"Twenty thousand dollars--think of that!" he sneered angrily.

"That is what I said, monsieur. I said I could save you money, and money saved is money earned. I am your benefactor, if you will but permit me to be so, monsieur. I would save you from the law, and from the damages

which the law gives. Can you not guess what would be given in a court of the Catholic province of Quebec, against the violation of a good man's home? Do you not see that the business is urgent?"

"Not at all," curtly replied the master-carpenter. M. Fille bridled up, and his spare figure seemed to gain courage and dignity.

"If you think I will hold my peace unless you give your sacred pledge, you are mistaken, monsieur. I am no meddler, but I have had much kindness at the hands of Monsieur and Madame Barbille, and I will do what I can to protect them and their daughter--that good and sweet daughter, from the machinations, corruptions and malfeasance--"

"Three damn good words for the Court, bagosh!" exclaimed Masson with a jeer.

"No, with a man devoid of honour, I shall not hesitate, for the Manor Cartier has been the home of domestic peace, and madame, who came to us a stranger, deserves well of the people of that ancient abode of chivalry--the chivalry of France."

"When we are wound up, what a humming we can make!" laughed George Masson sourly. "Have you quite finished, m'sieu'?"

"The matter is urgent, you will admit, monsieur?" again demanded M. Fille with austerity.

"Not at all."

The master-carpenter was defiant and insolent, yet there was a devilish kind of humour in his tone as in his attitude.

"You will not heed the warning I give?" The little Clerk pointed to the open page of the Victorian statutes before him.

"Not at all."

"Then I shall, with profound regret--"

Suddenly George Masson thrust his face forward near that of M. Fille, who did not draw back.

"You will inform the Court that the prisoner refuses to incriminate himself, eh?" he interjected.

"No, monsieur, I will inform Monsieur Barbille of what I saw. I will do this without delay. It is the one thing left me to do."

In quite a grand kind of way he stood up and bowed, as though to dismiss his visitor.

As George Masson did not move, the other went to the door and opened it. "It is the only thing left to do," he repeated, as he made a gentle gesture of dismissal.

"Not at all, my legal bombardier. Not at all, I say. All you know Jean Jacques knows, and a good deal more--what he has seen with his own eyes, and understood with his own mind, without legal help. So, you see, you've kept me here talking when there's no need and while my business

waits. It is urgent, M'sieu' la Fillette--your business is stale. It belongs to last session of the Court." He laughed at his joke. "M'sieu' Jean Jacques and I understand each other." He laughed grimly now. "We know each other like a book, and the Clerk of the Court couldn't get in an adjective that would make the sense of it all clearer."

Slowly M. Fille shut the door, and very slowly he came back. Almost blindly, as it might seem, and with a moan, he dropped into his chair. His eyes fixed themselves on George Masson.

"Ah--that!" he said helplessly. "That! The little Zoe--dear God, the little Zoe, and the poor madame!" His voice was aching with pain and repugnance.

"If you were not such an icicle naturally, I'd be thinking your interest in the child was paternal," said the master-carpenter roughly, for the virtuous horror of the other's face annoyed him. He had had a vexing day.

The Clerk of the Court was on his feet in a second. "Monsieur, you dare!" he exclaimed. "You dare to multiply your crimes in that shameless way. Begone! There are those who can make you respect decency. I am not without my friends, and we all stand by each other in our love of home--of sacred home, monsieur."

There was something right in the master-carpenter at the bottom, with all his villainy. It was not alone that he knew there were fifty men in the Parish of St. Saviour's who would man-handle him for such a suggestion, and for what he had done at the Manor Cartier, if they were roused; but he also had a sudden remorse for insulting the man who, after all, had tried to do him a service. His amende was instant.

"I take it back with humble apology--all I can hold in both hands, m'sieu'," he said at once. "I would not insult you so, much less Madame Barbille. If she'd been like what I've hinted at, I wouldn't have gone her way, for the promiscuous is not for me. I'll tell you the whole truth of what happened to-day this morning. Last night I met her at the river, and--"Then briefly he told all that had happened to the moment when Jean Jacques had left him at the flume with the words, "Moi, je suis philosophe!" And at the last he said:

"I give you my word--my oath on this"--he laid his hand on the Testament on the table--"that beyond what you saw, and what Jean Jacques saw, there has been nothing." He held up a hand as though taking an oath.

"Name of God, is it not enough what there has been?" whispered the little Clerk.

"Oh, as you think, and as you say! It is quite enough for me after to-day. I'm a teetotaller, but I'm not so fond of water as to want to take my eternal bath in it." He shuddered slightly. "Bien sur, I've had my fill of the Manor Cartier for one day, my Clerk of the Court."

"Bien sur, it was enough to set you thinking, monsieur," was the dry comment of M. Fille, who was now recovering his composure.

At that moment there came a knock at the door, and another followed quickly; then there entered without waiting for a reply--Carmen Barbille.

CHAPTER XII

THE MASTER-CARPENTER HAS A PROBLEM

The Clerk of the Court came to his feet with a startled "Merci!" and the master-carpenter fell back with a smothered exclamation. Both men stared confusedly at the woman as she shut the door slowly and, as it might seem, carefully, before she faced them.

"Here I am, George," she said, her face alive with vital adventure.

His face was instantly swept by a storm of feeling for her, his nature responded to the sound of her voice and the passion of her face.

"Carmen--ah !" he said, and took a step forward, then stopped. The hoarse feeling in his voice made her eyes flash gratitude and triumph, and she waited for him to take her in his arms; but she suddenly remembered M. Fille. She turned to him.

"I am sorry to intrude, m'sieu'," she said. "I beg your pardon. They told me at the office of avocat Prideaux that M'sieu' Masson was here. So I came; but be sure I would not interrupt you if there was not cause."

M. Fille came forward and took her hand respectfully. "Madame, it is the first time you have honoured me here. I am very glad to receive you. Monsieur and Mademoiselle Zoe, they are with you? They will also come in perhaps?"

M. Fille was courteous and kind, yet he felt that a duty was devolving on him, imposed by his superior officer, Judge Carcasson, and by his own conscience, and with courage he faced the field of trouble which his simple question opened up. George Masson had but now said there had been nothing more than he himself had seen from the hill behind the Manor; and he had further said, in effect, that all was ended between Carmen Barbille and himself; yet here they were together, when they ought to be a hundred miles apart for many a day. Besides, there was the look in the woman's face, and that intense look also in the face of the master-carpenter! The Clerk of the Court, from sheer habit of his profession, watched human faces as other people watch the weather, or the rise or fall in the price of wheat and potatoes. He was an archaic little official, and apparently quite unsophisticated; yet there was hidden behind his ascetic face a quiet astuteness which would have been a valuable asset to a worldly-minded and ambitious man. Besides, affection sharpens the wits. Through it the hovering, protecting sense becomes instinctive, and prescience takes on uncanny certainty. He had a real and deep affection for Jean Jacques and his Carmen, and a deeper one still for the child Zoe; and the danger to the home at the Manor Cartier now became again as sharp as the knife of the guillotine. His eyes ran from the woman to the man, and back again, and then with great courage he repeated his question:

"Monsieur and mademoiselle, they are well--they are with you, I hope, madame?"

She looked at him in the eyes without flinching, and on the instant she was aware that he knew all, and that there had been talk with George

Masson. She knew the little man to be as good as ever can be, but she resented the fact that he knew. It was clear George Masson had told him--else how could he know; unless, perhaps, all the world knew!

"You know well enough that I have come alone, my friend," she answered. "It is no place for Zoe; and it is no place for my husband and him together" she made a motion of the head towards the mastercarpenter. "Santa Maria, you know it very well indeed!"

The Clerk of the Court bowed, but made no reply. What was there to say to a remark like that! It was clear that the problem must be worked out alone between these two people, though he was not quite sure what the problem was. The man had said the thing was over; but the woman had come, and the look of both showed that it was not all over.

What would the man do? What was it the woman wished to do? The mastercarpenter had said that Jean Jacques had spared him, and meant to forgive his wife. No doubt he had done so, for Jean Jacques was a man of sentiment and chivalry, and there was no proof that there had been anything more than a few mad caresses between the two misdemeanants; yet here was the woman with the man for whom she had imperilled her future and that of her husband and child!

As though Carmen understood what was going on in his mind, she said: "Since you know everything, you can understand that I want a few words with M'sieu' George here alone."

"Madame, I beg of you," the Clerk of the Court answered instantly, his voice trembling a little--"I beg that you will not be alone with him. As I believe, your husband is willing to let bygones be bygones, and to begin to-morrow as though there was no to-day. In such case you should not see Monsieur Masson here alone. It is bad enough to see him here in the office of the Clerk of the Court, but to see him alone--what would Monsieur Jean Jacques say? Also, outside there in the street, if our neighbours should come to know of the trouble, what would they say? I wish not to be tiresome, but as a friend, a true friend of your whole family, madame--yes, in spite of all, your whole family--I hope you will realize that I must remain here. I owe it to a past made happy by kindness which is to me like life itself. Monsieur Masson, is it not so?" he added, turning to the master-carpenter. More flushed and agitated than when he had faced Jean Jacques in the flume, the mastercarpenter said: "If she wants a few words-of farewell--alone with me, she must have it, M'sieu' Fille. The other room--eh? Outside there"--he jerked a finger towards the street--"they won't know that you are not with us; and as for Jean Jacques, isn't it possible for a Clerk of the Court to stretch the truth a little? Isn't the Clerk of the Court a man as well as a mummy? I'd do as much for you, little lawyer, any time. A word to say farewell, you understand!" He looked M. Fille squarely in the eye.

"If I had to answer M. Jean Jacques on such a matter--and so much at stake--"

Masson interrupted. "Well, if you like we'll bind your eyes and put wads in your ears, and you can stay, so that you'll have been in the room all the time, and yet have heard and seen nothing at all. How is that, m'sieu'? It's all right, isn't it?"

M. Fille stood petrified for a moment at the audacity of the proposition.

For him, the Clerk of the Court, to be blinded and made ridiculous with wads in his ears-impossible!

"Grace of Heaven, I would prefer to lie!" he answered quickly. "I will go into the next room, but I beg that you be brief, monsieur and madame. You owe it to yourselves and to the situation to be brief, and, if I may say so, you owe it to me. I am not a practised Ananias."

"As well be hung for a sheep as a lamb, m'sieu'," returned Masson.

"I must beg that you will make your farewells of a minute and no more," replied the Clerk of the Court firmly. He took out his watch. "It is six o'clock. I will come again at three minutes past six. That is long enough for any farewell--even on the gallows."

Not daring to look at the face of the woman, he softly disappeared into the other room, and shut the door without a sound.

"Too good for this world," remarked the master-carpenter when the door closed tight. He said it after the disappearing figure and not to Carmen. "I don't suppose he ever kissed a real grown-up woman in his life. It would have shattered his frail little carcass if, if"--he turned to his companion--"if you had kissed him, Carmen. He's made of tissue-paper,--not tissue--and apple-jelly. Yes, but a stiff little backbone, too, or he'd not have faced me down."

Masson talked as though he were trying to gain time. "He said three minutes," she returned with a look of death in her face. As George Masson had talked with the Clerk of the Court, she had come to see, in so far as agitation would permit, that he was not the same as when he left her by the river the evening before.

"There's no time to waste," she continued. "You spoke of farewells--twice you spoke, and three times he spoke of farewells between us. Farewells--farewells--George--!"

With sudden emotion she held out her arms, and her face flushed with passion and longing.

The tempest which shook her shook him also, and he swayed from side to side like an animal uncertain if the moment had come to try its strength with its foe; and in truth the man was fighting with himself. His moments with Jean Jacques at the flume had expanded him in a curious kind of way. His own arguments while he was fighting for his life had, in a way, convinced himself. She was a rare creature, and she was alluring--more alluring than she had ever been; for a tragic sense had made her thinner, had refined the boldness of her beauty, had given a wonderful lustre to her eyes; and suffering has its own attraction to the degenerate. But he, George Masson, had had a great shock, and he had come out of the jaws of death by the skin of his teeth. It had been the nearest thing he had ever known; for though once he had had a pistol pointed at him, there was the chance that it might miss at half-a-dozen yards, while there was no chance of the lever of the flume going wrong; and water and a mill-wheel were as absolute as the rope of the gallows.

In a sense he had saved himself by his cleverness, but if Jean Jacques had not been just the man he was, he could not have saved himself. It did not occur to him that Jean Jacques had acted weakly. He would not have done what Jean Jacques had done, had Jean Jacques spoiled his home.

He would have sprung the lever; but he was not so mean as to despise Jean Jacques because he had foregone his revenge. This master-carpenter had certain gifts, or he could not have caused so much trouble in the world. There is a kind of subtlety necessary to allure or delude even the humblest of women, if she is not naturally bad; and Masson had had experiences with the humblest, and also with those a little higher up. This much had to be said for him, that he did not think Jean Jacques contemptible because he had been merciful, or degraded because he had chosen to forgive his wife.

The sight of the woman, as she stood with arms outstretched, had made his pulses pound in his veins, but the heat was suddenly chilled by the wave of tragedy which had passed over him. When he had climbed out of the flume, and opened the lever for the river to rush through, he had felt as though ice--cold liquid flowed in his veins, not blood; and all day he had been like that. He had moved much as one in a dream, and he had felt for the first time in his life that he was not ready to bluff creation. He had always faced things down, as long as it could be done; and when it could not, he had retreated, with the comment that no man was wise who took gruel when he needn't. He was now face to face with his greatest problem. One thing was clear--they must either part for ever, or go together, and part no more. There could be no half measures. She was a remarkable woman in her way, with a will of her own, and a kind of madness in her; and there could be no backing and filling. They only had three minutes to talk together alone, and two of them were up.

Her arms were held out to him, but he stood still, and before the fire of her eyes his own eyes dropped. "No, not yet!" he exclaimed. "It's been a day--heaven and hell, what a day it's been! He had me like that!" He opened and shut his hand with fierce, spasmodic strength. "And he let me go--oh, let me go like a fox out of a trap! I've had enough for one day--blood of St. Peter, enough, enough!"

The flame of desire in her eyes suddenly turned to fury. "It is farewell, then, that you wish," she said hoarsely. "It is no more and farewell then? You said it to him"--she pointed to the other room--"you said it to Jean Jacques, and you say it to me--to me that's given you all I have. Ah, what a beast you are, George Masson!"

"No, Carmen, you have not given me all. If you had, there would be no farewell. I would stand by you to the end of life, if I had taken all." He lied, but that does not matter here.

"All--all!" she cried. "What is all? Is it but the one thing that the world says must part husband and wife? Caramba! Is that all? I have given everything--I have had your arms around me--"

"Yes, the Clerk of the Court saw that," he interrupted. "He saw from the hill behind the Manor on Tuesday last."

There was a tap at the door of the other room; it slowly opened, and the figure of the Clerk appeared. "Two minutes--just two minutes more, old trump!" said the master-carpenter, stretching out a hand. "One minute will be enough," said Carmen, who was suffering the greatest humiliation which can come to a woman.

The Clerk looked at them both, and he was content. He saw that one minute would certainly be enough. "Very well, monsieur and madame," he said, and closed the door again.

Carmen turned fiercely on the man. "M. Fille saw, did he, from Mont Violet? Well, when I came here I did not care who saw. I only thought of you--that you wanted me, and that I wanted you. What the world thought was nothing, if you were as when we parted last night. . . . I could not face Jean Jacques' forgiveness. To stay there, feeling that I must be always grateful, that I must be humble, that I must pretend, that I must kiss Jean Jacques, and lie in his arms, and go to mass and to confession, and--"

"There is the child, there is Zoe--"

"Oh, it is you that preaches now--you that tempted me, that said I was wasted at the Manor; that the parish did not understand me; that Jean Jacques did not know a jewel of price when he saw it--little did you think of Zoe then!"

He made a protesting gesture. "Maybe so, Carmen, but I think now before it is too late."

"The child loves her father as she never loved me," she declared. "She is twelve years old. She will soon be old enough to keep house for him, and then to marry--ah, before there is time to think she will marry!"

"It would be better then for you to wait till she marries before--before--"

"Before I go away with you!" She gave a shrill, agonized laugh. "So that is the end of it all! What did you think of my child when you forced your way into my life, when you made me think of you--ah, quel bete--what a coward and beast you are!"

"No, I am not all coward, though I may be a beast," he answered. "I didn't think of your child when I began to talk to you as I did. I was out for all I could get. I was the hunter. And you were the finest woman that I'd ever met and talked with; you--"

"Oh, stop lying!" she cried with a face suddenly grown white and cold.

"It isn't lying. You're the sort of woman to drive men mad. I went mad, and I didn't think of your child. But this morning in the flume I saved my life by thinking of her, and I saved your life, too, maybe, by thinking of her; and I owe her something. I'm going to try to pay back by letting her keep her mother. I never felt towards a woman as I've felt towards you; and that's why I want to make things not so bad for you as they might be."

In her bitter eagerness she took a step nearer to him. "As things might be, if you were the man you were yesterday, willing to throw up everything for me?"

"Like that--if you put it so," he answered.

She walked slowly up to him, looking as though she would plunge a knife into his heart. "I wish Jean Jacques had opened the gates," she said. "It would have saved the hangman trouble."

Then suddenly, and with a cry, she raised her hand and struck him full in the face with her fist. At that instant came a tap at the door of the

other room, and the Clerk of the Court appeared. He saw the blow, and drew back with an exclamation.

Carmen turned to him. "Farewell has been said, M'sieu' Fille," she remarked in a voice sombre with rage and despair, and she went to the door leading to the street.

Masson had winced at the blow, but he remained silent. He knew not what to say or do.

M. Fille hastily followed Carmen to the door. "You are going home, dear madame? Permit me to accompany you," he said gently. "I have to do business with Jean Jacques."

A hand upon his chest, she pushed him back. "Where I go I'm going alone," she said. Opening the door she went out, but turning back again she gave George Masson a look that he never forgot. Then the door closed.

"Grace of God, she is not going home!" brokenly murmured the Clerk of the Court.

With a groan the master-carpenter started forward towards the door, but M. Fille stepped between, laid a hand on his arm, and stopped him.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Confidence in a weak world gets unearned profit often
Enjoy his own generosity
Had the slight flavour of the superior and the paternal
He had only made of his wife an incident in his life
He was in fact not a philosopher, but a sentimentalist
He was not always sorry when his teasing hurt
Lacks a balance-wheel. He has brains, but not enough
Man who tells the story in a new way, that is genius
Missed being a genius by an inch
Not content to do even the smallest thing ill
You went north towards heaven and south towards hell

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