

The Venial Sin

Honore de Balzac

How the Good Man Bruyn Took a Wife

Messire Bruyn, he who completed the Castle of Roche-Carbon-les- Vouvray, on the banks of the Loire, was a boisterous fellow in his youth. When quite little, he squeezed young ladies, turned the house out of windows, and played the devil with everything, when he was called upon to put his Sire the Baron of Roche-Carbon some few feet under the turf. Then he was his own master, free to lead a life of wild dissipation, and indeed he worked very hard to get a surfeit of enjoyment. Now by making his crowns sweat and his goods scarce, draining his land, and a bleeding his hogsheads, and regaling frail beauties, he found himself excommunicated from decent society, and had for his friends only the plunderers of towns and the Lombardians. But the usurers turned rough and bitter as chestnut husks, when he had no other security to give them than his said estate of Roche-Carbon, since the Rupes Carbonis was held from our Lord the king. Then Bruyn found himself just in the humour to give a blow here and there, to break a collar-bone or two, and quarrel with everyone about trifles. Seeing which, the Abbot of Marmoustiers, his neighbour, and a man liberal with his advice, told him that it was an evident sign of lordly perfection, that he was walking in the right road, but if he would go and slaughter, to the great glory of God, the Mahommedans who defiled the Holy Land, it would be better still, and that he would undoubtedly return full of wealth and indulgences into Touraine, or into Paradise, whence all barons formerly came.

The said Bruyn, admiring the great sense of the prelate, left the country equipped by the monastery, and blessed by the abbot, to the great delight of his friends and neighbours. Then he put to the sack enough many towns of Asia and Africa, and fell upon the infidels without giving them warning, burning the Saracens, the Greeks, the English, and others, caring little whether they were friends or enemies, or where they came from, since among his merits he had that of being in no way curious, and he never questioned them until after he had killed them. At this business, agreeable to God, to the King and to himself, Bruyn gained renown as a good Christian and loyal knight, and enjoyed himself thoroughly in these lands beyond the seas, since he more willingly gave a crown to the girls than to the poor, although he met many more poor people than perfect maids; but like a good Touranian he made soup of anything. At length, when he was satiated with the Turks, relics, and other blessings of the Holy Land, Bruyn, to the great astonishment of the people of Vouvrillons, returned from the Crusades laden with crowns and precious stones; rather differently from some who, rich when they set out, came back heavy with leprosy, but light with gold. On his return from Tunis, our Lord, King Philippe, made him a Count, and appointed him his seneschal in our country and that of Poitou. There he was greatly beloved and properly thought well of, since over and above his good qualities he founded the Church of the Carmes-Deschaulx, in the parish of Egrignolles, as the peace-offering to Heaven for the follies of his youth. Thus was he cardinally consigned to the good graces of the Church and of God. From a wicked youth and reckless man, he became a good, wise man, and discreet in his dissipations and pleasures; rarely was in anger, unless someone blasphemed God before him, the which he would not tolerate because he had blasphemed enough for every one in his wild youth. In short, he never quarrelled, because, being seneschal, people gave up to him instantly. It is true that he at that time beheld all his

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desires accomplished, the which would render even an imp of Satan calm and tranquil from his horns to his heels. And besides this he possessed a castle all jagged at the corners, and shaped and pointed like a Spanish doublet, situated upon a bank from which it was reflected in the Loire. In the rooms were royal tapestries, furniture, Saracen pomps, vanities, and inventions which were much admired by people of Tours, and even by the archbishop and clerks of St. Martin, to whom he sent as a free gift a banner fringed with fine gold. In the neighbourhood of the said castle abounded fair domains, wind-mills, and forests, yielding a harvest of rents of all kinds, so that he was one of the strongest knights-banneret of the province, and could easily have led to battle for our lord the king a thousand men. In his old days, if by chance his bailiff, a diligent man at hanging, brought before him a poor peasant suspected of some offence, he would say, smiling--

"Let this one go, Brediff, he will count against those I inconsiderately slaughtered across the seas"; oftentimes, however, he would let them bravely hang on a chestnut tree or swing on his gallows, but this was solely that justice might be done, and that the custom should not lapse in his domain. Thus the people on his lands were good and orderly, like fresh veiled nuns, and peaceful since he protected them from the robbers and vagabonds whom he never spared, knowing by experience how much mischief is caused by these cursed beasts of prey. For the rest, most devout, finishing everything quickly, his prayers as well as good wine, he managed the processes after the Turkish fashion, having a thousand little jokes ready for the losers, and dining with them to console them. He had all the people who had been hanged buried in consecrated ground like godly ones, some people thinking they had been sufficiently punished by having their breath stopped. He only persecuted the Jews now and then, and when they were glutted with usury and wealth. He let them gather their spoil as the bees do honey, saying that they were the best of tax-gatherers. And never did he despoil them save for the profit and use of the churchmen, the king, the province, or himself.

This jovial way gained for him the affection and esteem of every one, great and small. If he came back smiling from his judicial throne, the Abbot of Marmoustiers, an old man like himself, would say, "Ho, ha! messire, there is some hanging on since you laugh thus!" And when coming from Roche-Carbon to Tours he passed on horseback along the Fauborg St. Symphorien, the little girls would say, "Ah! this is the justice day, there is the good man Bruyn," and without being afraid they would look at him astride on a big white hack, that he had brought back with him from the Levant. On the bridge the little boys would stop playing with the ball, and would call out, "Good day, Mr. Seneschal" and he would reply, jokingly, "Enjoy yourselves, my children, until you get whipped." "Yes, Mr. Seneschal."

Also he made the country so contented and so free from robbers that during the year of the great over-flowing of the Loire there were only twenty-two malefactors hanged that winter, not counting a Jew burned in the Commune of Chateau-Neuf for having stolen a consecrated wafer, or bought it, some said, for he was very rich.

One day, in the following year about harvest time, or mowing time, as we say in Touraine, there came Egyptians, Bohemians, and other wandering troupes who stole the holy things from the Church of St. Martin, and in the place and exact situation of Madam the Virgin, left by way of insult and mockery to our Holy Faith, an abandoned pretty little girl, about the age of an old dog, stark naked, an acrobat, and of Moorish descent like themselves. For this almost nameless crime it was equally decided by the king, people, and the churchmen that the Mooress, to pay for all, should be burned and cooked alive in the square near the

fountain where the herb market is. Then the good man Bruyn clearly and dextrously demonstrated to the others that it would be a thing most profitable and pleasant to God to gain over this African soul to the true religion, and if the devil were lodged in this feminine body the faggots would be useless to burn him, as said the said order. To which the archbishop sagely thought most canonical and conformable to Christian charity and the gospel. The ladies of the town and other persons of authority said loudly that they were cheated of a fine ceremony, since the Mooress was crying her eyes out in the jail and would certainly be converted to God in order to live as long as a crow, if she were allowed to do so, to which the seneschal replied that if the foreigner would wholly commit herself to the Christian religion there would be a gallant ceremony of another kind, and that he would undertake that it should be royally magnificent, because he would be her sponsor at the baptismal font, and that a virgin should be his partner in the affair in order the better to please the Almighty, while himself was reputed never to have lost the bloom or innocence, in fact to be a coquebin. In our country of Touraine thus are called the young virgin men, unmarried or so esteemed to distinguish them from the husbands and the widowers, but the girls always pick them without the name, because they are more light-hearted and merry than those seasoned in marriage.

The young Mooress did not hesitate between the flaming faggots and the baptismal water. She much preferred to be a Christian and live than be Egyptian and be burned; thus to escape a moment's baking, her heart would burn unquenched through all her life, since for the greater surety of her religion she was placed in the convent of nuns near Chardonneret, where she took the vow of sanctity. The said ceremony was concluded at the residence of the archbishop, where on this occasion, in honour of the Saviour or men, the lords and ladies of Touraine hopped, skipped and danced, for in this country the people dance, skip, eat, flirt, have more feasts and make merrier than any in the whole world. The good old seneschal had taken for his associate the daughter of the lord of Azay-le-Ridel, which afterwards became Azay-le-Brusle, the which lord being a Crusader was left before Acre, a far distant town, in the hands of a Saracen who demanded a royal ransom for him because the said lord was of high position.

The lady of Azay having given his estate as security to the Lombards and extortioners in order to raise the sum, remained, without a penny in the the world, awaiting her lord in a poor lodging in the town, without a carpet to sit upon, but proud as the Queen of Sheba and brave as a mastiff who defends the property of his master. Seeing this great distress the seneschal went delicately to request this lady's daughter to be the godmother of the said Egyptian, in order that he might have the right of assisting the Lady of Azay. And, in fact, he kept a heavy chain of gold which he had preserved since the commencement of the taking of Cyprus, and the which he determined to clasp about the neck of his pretty associate, but he hung there at the same time his domain, and his white hairs, his money and his horses; in short, he placed there everything he possessed, directly he had seen Blanche of Azay dancing a pavan among the ladies of Tours. Although the Moorish girl, making the most of her last day, had astonished the assembly by her twists, jumps, steps, springs, and elevations and artistic efforts, Blanche had the advantage of her, as everyone agreed, so virginally and delicately did she dance.

Now Bruyn, admiring this gentle maiden whose toes seemed to fear the boards, and who amused herself so innocently for her seventeen years-- like a grasshopper trying her first note--was seized with an old man's desire; a desire apoplectic and vigorous from weakness,

which heated him from the sole of foot to the nape of his neck--for his head had too much snow on the top of it to let love lodge there. Then the good man perceived that he needed a wife in his manor, and it appeared more lonely to him than it was. And what then was a castle without a chatelaine? As well have a clapper without its bell. In short, a wife was the only thing that he had to desire, so he wished to have one promptly, seeing that if the Lady of Azay made him wait, he had just time to pass out of this world into the other. But during the baptismal entertainment, he thought little of his severe wounds, and still less of the eighty years that had stripped his head; he found his eyes clear enough to see distinctly his young companion, who, following the injunctions of the Lady of Azay, regaled him well with glance and gesture, believing there could be no danger near so old a fellow, in such wise that Blanche--naive and nice as she was in contradistinction to the girls of Touraine, who are as wide-awake as a spring morning--permitted the good man first to kiss her hand, and afterwards her neck, rather low-down; at least so said the archbishop who married them the week after; and that was a beautiful bridal, and a still more beautiful bride.

The said Blanche was slender and graceful as no other girl, and still better than that, more maidenly than ever maiden was; a maiden all ignorant of love, who knew not why or what it was; a maiden who wondered why certain people lingered in their beds; a maiden who believed that children were found in parsley beds. Her mother had thus reared her in innocence, without even allowing her to consider, trifle as it was, how she sucked in her soup between her teeth. Thus she was a sweet flower, and intact, joyous and innocent; an angel, who needed but the wings to fly away to Paradise. When she left the poor lodging of her weeping mother to consummate her betrothal at the cathedral of St. Gatien and St. Maurice, the country people came to a feast their eyes upon the bride, and on the carpets which were laid down all along the Rue de la Scellerie, and all said that never had tinier feet pressed the ground of Touraine, prettier eyes gazed up to heaven, or a more splendid festival adorned the streets with carpets and with flowers. The young girls of St. Martin and of the boroughs of Chateau- Neuf, all envied the long brown tresses with which doubtless Blanche had fished for a count, but much more did they desire the gold embroidered dress, the foreign stones, the white diamonds, and the chains with which the little darling played, and which bound her for ever to the said seneschal. The old soldier was so merry by her side, that his happiness showed itself in his wrinkles, his looks, and his movements. Although he was hardly as straight as a billhook, he held himself so by the side of Blanche, that one would have taken him for a soldier on parade receiving his officer, and he placed his hand on his diaphragm like a man whose pleasure stifles and troubles him. Delighted with the sound of the swinging bells, the procession, the poms, and the vanities of the said marriage, which was talked of long after the episcopal rejoicings, the women desired a harvest of Moorish girls, a deluge of old seneschals, and baskets full of Egyptian baptisms. But this was the only one that ever happened in Touraine, seeing that the country is far from Egypt and from Bohemia. The Lady of Azay received a large sum of money after the ceremony, which enabled her to start immediately for Acre to go to her spouse, accompanied by the lieutenant and soldiers of the Count of Roche- Corbon, who furnished them with everything necessary. She set out on the day of the wedding, after having placed her daughter in the hands of the seneschal, enjoining him to treat her well; and later on she returned with the Sire d'Azay, who was leprous, and she cured him, tending him herself, running the risk of being contaminated, the which was greatly admired.

The marriage ceremony finished and at an end--for it lasted three days, to the great contentment of the people--Messire Bruyn with great pomp led the little one to his castle,

and, according to the custom of husbands, had her put solemnly to bed in his couch, which was blessed by the Abbot of Marmoustiers; then came and placed himself beside her in the great feudal chamber of Roche-Corbon, which had been hung with green blockade and ribbon of golden wire. When old Bruyn, perfumed all over, found himself side by side with his pretty wife, he kissed her first upon the forehead, and then upon the little round, white breast, on the same spot where she had allowed him to clasp the fastenings of the chain, but that was all. The old fellow had too great confidence in himself in fancying himself able to accomplish more; so then he abstained from love in spite of the merry nuptial songs, the epithalamiums and jokes which were going on in the rooms beneath where the dancing was still kept up. He refreshed himself with a drink of the marriage beverage, which according to custom, had been blessed and placed near them in a golden cup. The spices warmed his stomach well enough, but not the heart of his dead ardour. Blanche was not at all astonished at the demeanour of her spouse, because she was a virgin in mind, and in marriage she saw only that which is visible to the eyes of young girls--namely dresses, banquets, horses, to be a lady and mistress, to have a country seat, to amuse oneself and give orders; so, like the child that she was, she played with the gold tassels on the bed, and marvelled at the richness of the shrine in which her innocence should be interred. Feeling, a little later in the day, his culpability, and relying on the future, which, however, would spoil a little every day that with which he pretended to regale his wife, the seneschal tried to substitute the word for the deed. So he entertained his wife in various ways, promised her the keys of his sideboards, his granaries and chests, the perfect government of his houses and domains without any control, hanging round her neck "the other half of the loaf," which is the popular saying in Touraine. She became like a young charger full of hay, found her good man the most gallant fellow in the world, and raising herself upon her pillow began to smile, and beheld with greater joy this beautiful green brocaded bed, where henceforward she would be permitted, without any sin, to sleep every night. Seeing she was getting playful, the cunning lord, who had not been used to maidens, but knew from experience the little tricks that women will practice, seeing that he had much associated with ladies of the town, feared those handy tricks, little kisses, and minor amusements of love which formerly he did not object to, but which at the present time would have found him cold as the obit of a pope. Then he drew back towards the end of the bed, afraid of his happiness, and said to his too delectable spouse, "Well, darling, you are a seneschal's wife now, and very well seneschaled as well."

"Oh no!" said she.

"How no!" replied he in great fear; "are you not a wife?"

"No!" said she. "Nor shall I be till I have had a child."

"Did you while coming here see the meadows?" began again the old fellow.

"Yes," said she.

"Well, they are yours."

"Oh! Oh!" replied she laughing, "I shall amuse myself much there catching butterflies."

"That's a good girl," says her lord. "And the woods?"

"Ah! I should not like to be there alone, you will take me there. But," said she, "give me a little of that liquor which La Ponneuse has taken such pains to prepare for us."

"And why, my darling? It would put fire in your body."

"Oh! That's what I should like," said she, biting her lip with vexation, "because I desire to give you a child as soon as possible; and I'm sure that liquor is good for the purpose."

"Ah! my little one," said the seneschal, knowing by this that Blanche was a virgin from head to foot, "the goodwill of God is necessary for this business, and women must be in a state of harvest."

"And when should I be in a state of harvest?" asked she, smiling.

"When nature so wills it," said he, trying to laugh.

"What is it necessary to do for this?" replied she.

"Ah! A cabalistical and alchemical operation which is very dangerous."

"Ah!" said she, with a dreamy look, "that's the reason why my mother cried when thinking of the said metamorphosis; but Bertha de Breuilly, who is so thankful for being made a wife, told me it was the easiest thing in the world."

"That's according to the age," replied the old lord. "But did you see at the stable the beautiful white mare so much spoken of in Touraine?"

"Yes, she is very gentle and nice."

"Well, I give her to you, and you can ride her as often as the fancy takes you."

"Oh, you are very kind, and they did not lie when they told me so."

"Here," continued he, "sweetheart; the butler, the chaplain, the treasurer, the equerry, the farrier, the bailiff, even the Sire de Montsoreau, the young varlet whose name is Gauttier and bears my banner, with his men at arms, captains, followers, and beasts--all are yours, and will instantly obey your orders under pain of being incommoded with a hempen collar."

"But," replied she, "this mysterious operation--cannot it be performed immediately?"

"Oh no!" replied the seneschal. "Because it is necessary above all things that both the one and the other of us should be in a state of grace before God; otherwise we should have a bad child, full of sin; which is forbidden by the canons of the church. This is the reason that there are so many incorrigible scapegraces in the world. Their parents have not wisely waited to have their souls pure, and have given wicked souls to their children. The beautiful and the virtuous come of immaculate fathers; that is why we cause our beds to be blessed, as the Abbot of Marmoustiers has done this one. Have you not transgressed the ordinances of the Church?"

"Oh no," said she, quickly, "I received before Mass absolution for all my faults and have remained since without committing the slightest sin."

"You are very perfect," said the cunning lord, "and I am delighted to have you for a wife; but I have sworn like an infidel."

"Oh! and why?"

"Because the dancing did not finish, and I could not have you to myself to bring you here and kiss you."

Thereupon he gallantly took her hands and covered them with kisses, whispering to her little endearments and superficial words of affection which made her quite pleased and contented.

Then, fatigued with the dance and all the ceremonies, she settled down to her slumbers, saying to the seneschal--

"I will take care tomorrow that you shall not sin," and she left the old man quite smitten with her white beauty, amorous of her delicate nature, and as embarrassed to know how he should be able to keep her in her innocence as to explain why oxen chew their food twice over. Although he did not augur to himself any good therefrom, it inflamed him so much to see the exquisite perfections of Blanche during her innocent and gentle sleep, that he resolved to preserve and defend this pretty jewel of love. With tears in his eyes he kissed her sweet golden tresses, the beautiful eyelids, and her ripe red mouth, and he did it softly for fear of waking her. There was all his fruition, the dumb delight which still inflamed his heart without in the least affecting Blanche. Then he deplored the snows of his leafless old age, the poor old man, that he saw clearly that God had amused himself by giving him nuts when his teeth were gone.

How the Seneschal Struggled with His Wife's Modesty

During the first days of his marriage the seneschal imprinted many fibs to tell his wife, whose so estimable innocence he abused. Firstly, he found in his judicial functions good excuses for leaving her at times alone; then he occupied himself with the peasants of the neighbourhood, and took them to dress the vines on his lands at Vouvray, and at length pampered her up with a thousand absurd tales.

At one time he would say that lords did not behave like common people, that the children were only planted at certain celestial conjunctions ascertained by learned astrologers; at another that one should abstain from begetting children on feast days, because it was a great undertaking; and he observed the feasts like a man who wished to enter into Paradise without consent. Sometimes he would pretend that if by chance the parents were not in a state of grace, the children commenced on the date of St. Claire would be blind, of St. Gatien had the gout, of St. Agnes were scaldheaded, of St. Roch had the plague; sometimes that those begotten in February were chilly; in March, too turbulent; in April, were worth nothing at all; and that handsome boys were conceived in May. In short, he wished his child to be perfect, to have his hair of two colours; and for this it was necessary that all the required conditions should be observed. At other times he would say to Blanche that the

right of a man was to bestow a child upon his wife according to his sole and unique will, and that if she pretended to be a virtuous woman she should conform to the wishes of her husband; in fact it was necessary to await the return of the Lady of Azay in order that she should assist at the confinement; from all of which Blanche concluded that the seneschal was annoyed by her requests, and was perhaps right, since he was old and full of experience; so she submitted herself and thought no more, except to herself, of this so much-desired child, that is to say, she was always thinking of it, like a woman who has a desire in her head, without suspecting that she was behaving like a gay lady or a town-walker running after her enjoyment. One evening, by accident, Bruyn spoke of children, a discourse that he avoided as cats avoid water, but he was complaining of a boy condemned by him that morning for great misdeeds, saying for certain he was the offspring of people laden with mortal sins.

"Alas!" said Blanche, "if you will give me one, although you have not got absolution, I will correct so well that you will be pleased with him."

Then the count saw that his wife was bitten by a warm desire, and that it was time to dissipate her innocence in order to make himself master of it, to conquer it, to beat it, or to appease and extinguish it.

"What, my dear, you wish to be a mother?" said he; "you do not yet know the business of a wife, you are not accustomed to being mistress of the house."

"Oh! Oh!" said she, "to be a perfect countess, and have in my loins a little count, must I play the great lady? I will do it, and thoroughly."

Then Blanche, in order to obtain issue, began to hunt the fawns and stags, leaping the ditches, galloping upon her mare over valleys and mountain, through the woods and the fields, taking great delight in watching the falcons fly, in unhooding them and while hunting always carried them gracefully upon her little wrist, which was what the seneschal had desired. But in this pursuit, Blanche gained an appetite of nun and prelate, that is to say, wished to procreate, had her desires whetted, and could scarcely restrain her hunger, when on her return she gave play to her teeth. Now by reason of reading the legends written by the way, and of separating by death the embraces of birds and wild beasts, she discovered a mystery of natural alchemy, while colouring her complexion, and superagitating her feeble imagination, which did little to pacify her warlike nature, and strongly tickled her desire which laughed, played, and frisked unmistakably. The seneschal thought to disarm the rebellious virtue of his wife by making her scour the country; but his fraud turned out badly, for the unknown lust that circulated in the veins of Blanche emerged from these assaults more hardy than before, inviting jousts and tourneys as the herald the armed knight.

The good lord saw then that he had grossly erred and that he was now upon the horns of a dilemma; also he no longer knew what course to adopt; the longer he left it the more it would resist. From this combat, there must result one conquered and one contused--a diabolical contusion which he wished to keep distant from his physiognomy by God's help until after his death. The poor seneschal had already great trouble to follow his lady to the chase, without being dismounted; he sweated under the weight of his trappings, and almost expired in that pursuit wherein his frisky wife cheered her life and took great pleasure. Many times in the evening she wished to dance. Now the good man, swathed in his heavy

clothing, found himself quite worn out with these exercises, in which he was constrained to participate either in giving her his hand, when she performed the vaults of the Moorish girl, or in holding the lighted fagot for her, when she had a fancy to do the torchlight dance; and in spite of his sciaticas, accretions, and rheumatisms, he was obliged to smile and say to her some gentle words and gallantries after all the evolutions, mummeries, and comic pantomimes, which she indulged in to divert herself; for he loved her so madly that if she had asked him for an impossibility he would have sought one for her immediately.

Nevertheless, one fine day he recognised the fact that his frame was in a state of too great debility to struggle with the vigorous nature of his wife, and humiliating himself before his wife's virtue he resolved to let things take their course, relying a little upon the modesty, religion, and bashfulness of Blanche, but he always slept with one eye open, for he suspected that God had perhaps made virginities to be taken like partridges, to be spitted and roasted. One wet morning, when the weather was that in which the snails make their tracks, a melancholy time, and suitable to reverie, Blanche was in the house sitting in her chair in deep thought, because nothing produces more lively concoctions of the substantive essences, and no receipt, specific or philter is more penetrating, transpiercing or doubly transpiercing and titillating than the subtle warmth which simmers between the nap of the chair and a maiden sitting during certain weather.

Now without knowing it the Countess was incommoded by her innocence, which gave more trouble than it was worth to her brain, and gnawed her all over. Then the good man, seriously grieved to see her languishing, wished to drive away the thoughts which were ultra-conjugal principles of love.

"Whence comes your sadness, sweetheart?" said he.

"From shame."

"What then affronts you?"

"The not being a good woman; because I am without a child, and you without lineage! Is one a lady without progeny? Nay! Look! . . . All my neighbours have it, and I was married to have it, as you to give it to me; the nobles of Touraine are all amply furnished with children, and their wives give them lapfuls, you alone have none, they laugh at you there. What will become of your name and your fiefs and your seigniories? A child is our natural company; it is a delight to us to make a fright of it, to fondle it, to swaddle it, to dress and undress it, to cuddle it, to sing it lullabies, to cradle it, to get it up, to put it to bed, and to nourish it, and I feel that if I had only the half of one, I would kiss it, swaddle it, and unharness it, and I would make it jump and crow all day long, as the other ladies do."

"Were it not that in giving them birth women die, and that for this you are still too delicate and too close in the bud, you would already be a mother," replied the seneschal, made giddy with the flow of words. "But will you buy one ready-made?--that will cost you neither pain nor labour."

"But," said she, "I want the pain and labour, without which it will not be ours. I know very well it should be the fruit of my body, because at church they say that Jesus was the fruit of the Virgin's womb."

"Very well, then pray God that it may be so," cried the seneschal, "and intercede with the Virgin of Egrignolles. Many a lady has conceived after the neuvaine; you must not fail to do one."

Then the same day Blanche set out towards Notre-Dame de l'Egrignolles, decked out like a queen riding her beautiful mare, having on her a robe of green velvet, laced down with fine gold lace, open at the breast, having sleeves of scarlet, little shoes and a high hat ornamented with precious stones, and a gold waistband that showed off her little waist, as slim as a pole. She wished to give her dress to Madame the Virgin, and in fact promised it to her, for the day of her churching. The Sire de Montsoreau galloped before her, his eye bright as that of a hawk, keeping the people back and guarding with his knights the security of the journey. Near Marmoustiers the seneschal, rendered sleepy by the heat, seeing it was the month of August, waggled about in his saddle, like a diadem upon the head of a cow, and seeing so frolicsome and so pretty a lady by the side of so old a fellow, a peasant girl, who was squatting near the trunk of a tree and drinking water out of her stone jug inquired of a toothless old hag, who picked up a trifle by gleanings, if this princess was going to bury her dead.

"Nay," said the old woman, "it is our lady of Roche-Corbon, wife of the seneschal of Poitou and Touraine, in quest of a child."

"Ah! Ah!" said the young girl, laughing like a fly just satisfied; then pointing to the handsome knight who was at the head of the procession--"he who marches at the head would manage that; she would save the wax-candles and the vow."

"Ha! my little one," replied the hag, "I am rather surprised that she should go to Notre-Dame de l'Egrignolles seeing that there are no handsome priests there. She might very well stop for a short time beneath the shadow the belfry of Marmoustiers; she would soon be fertile, those good fathers are so lively."

"By a nun's oath!" said a tramp walking up, "look; the Sire de Montsoreau is lively and delicate enough to open the lady's heart, the more so as he is well formed to do so."

And all commenced a laugh. The Sire de Montsoreau wished to go to them and hang them in lime-tree by the road as a punishment for their bad words, but Blanche cried out quickly--

"Oh, sir, do not hang them yet. They have not said all they mean; and we shall see them on our return."

She blushed, and the Sire de Montsoreau looked at her eagerly, as though to shoot into her the mystic comprehensions of love, but the clearing out of her intelligence had already been commenced by the sayings of the peasants which were fructifying in her understanding--her innocence was like touchwood, there was only need for a word to inflame it.

Thus Blanche perceived now the notable and physical differences between the qualities of her old husband and perfections of the said Gauttier, a gentleman who was not over affected with his twenty-three years, but held himself upright as a ninepin in the saddle, and as wide-

awake as the matin chimes, while in contrast to him, slept the seneschal; he had courage and dexterity there where his master failed. He was one of those smart fellows whom the jades would sooner wear at night than a leathern garment, because they then no longer fear the fleas; there are some who vituperate them, but no one should be blamed, because every one should sleep as he likes.

So much did the seneschal's lady think, and so imperially well, that by the time she arrived at the bridge of Tours, she loved Gauttier secretly, as a maiden loves, without suspecting that it is love. From that she became a proper woman, that is to say, she desired the good of others, the best that men have, she fell into a fit of love-sickness, going at the first jump to the depth of her misery, seeing that all is flame between the first coveting and the last desire, and she knew not how she then learned that by the eyes can flow in a subtle essence, causing such powerful corrosions in all the veins of the body, recesses of the heart, nerves of the members, roots of the hair, perspiration of the substance, limbo of the brain, orifices of the epidermis, windings of the pluck, tubes of the hypochondriac and other channels which in her was suddenly dilated, heated, tickled, envenomed, clawed, harrowed, and disturbed, as if she had a basketful of needles in her inside. This was a maiden's desire, a well-conditioned desire, which troubled her sight to such a degree that she no longer saw her old spouse, but clearly the young Gauttier, whose nature was as ample as the glorious chin of an abbot. When the good man entered Tours the Ah! Ah! of the crowd woke him up, and he came with great pomp with his suite to the Church of Notre-Dame de l'Egrignolles, formerly called la greigneur, as if you said that which has the most merit. Blanche went into the chapel where children are asked to God and of the Virgin, and went there alone, as was the custom, always however in the presence of the seneschal, of his varlets and the loiterers who remained outside the grill. When the countess saw the priest come who had charge of the masses said for children, and who received the said vows, she asked him if there were many barren women. To which the good priest replied, that he must not complain, and that the children were good revenue to the Church.

"And do you often see," said Blanche, "young women with such old husbands as my lord?"

"Rarely," said he.

"But have those obtained offspring?"

"Always," replied the priest smiling.

"And the others whose companions are not so old?"

"Sometimes."

"Oh! Oh!" said she, "there is more certainty then with one like the seneschal?"

"To be sure," said the priest.

"Why?" said she.

"Madame," gravely replied priest, "before that age God alone interferes with the affair, after, it is the men."

At this time it was a true thing that all the wisdom had gone to the clergy. Blanch made her vow, which was a very profitable one, seeing that her decorations were worth quite two thousand gold crowns.

"You are very joyful!" said the old seneschal to her when on the home journey she made her mare prance, jump, and frisk.

"Yes, yes!" said she. "There is no longer any doubt about my having a child, because any one can help me, the priest said: I shall take Gauttier."

The seneschal wished to go and slay the monk, but he thought that was a crime which would cost him too much, and he resolved cunningly to arrange his vengeance with the help of the archbishop; and before the housetops of Roche-Corbon came in sight he had ordered the Sire de Montsoreau to seek a little retirement in his own country, which the young Gauttier did, knowing the ways of the lord. The seneschal put in the place of the said Gauttier the son of the Sire de Jallanges, whose fief was held from Roche-Corbon. He was a young boy named Rene, approaching fourteen years, and he made him a page, awaiting the time when he should be old enough to be an equerry, and gave the command of his men to an old cripple, with whom he had knocked about a great deal in Palestine and other places. Thus the good man believed he would avoid the horned trappings of cuckoldom, and would still be able to girth, bridle, and curb the factious innocence of his wife, which struggled like a mule held by a rope.

That Which is Only a Venial Sin

The Sunday following the arrival of Rene at the manor of Roche-Corbon, Blanche went out hunting without her goodman, and when she was in the forest near Les Carneaux, saw a monk who appeared to be pushing a girl about more than was necessary, and spurred on her horse, saying to her people, "Ho there! Don't let him kill her." But when the seneschal's lady arrived close to them, she turned her horse's head quickly and the sight she beheld prevented her from hunting. She came back pensive, and then the lantern of her intelligence opened, and received a bright light, which made a thousand things clear, such as church and other pictures, fables, and lays of the troubadours, or the domestic arrangements of birds; suddenly she discovered the sweet mystery of love written in all languages, even in that of the Carps!. Is it not silly thus to seal this science from maidens? Soon Blanche went to bed, and soon said she to the seneschal--

"Bruyn, you have deceived me, you ought to behave as the monk of the Carneaux behaved to the girl."

Old Bruyn suspected the adventure, and saw well that his evil hour was at hand. He regarded Blanche with too much fire in his eyes for the same ardour to be lower down, and answered her softly--

"Alas! sweetheart, in taking you for my wife I had more love than strength, and I have taken advantage of your clemency and virtue. The great sorrow of my life is to feel all my capability in my heart only. This sorrow hastens my death little by little, so that you will soon be free. Wait for my departure from this world. That is the sole request that he makes of you, he who is your master, and who could command you, but who wishes only to be

your prime minister and slave. Do not betray the honour of my white hairs! Under these circumstances there have been lords who have slain their wives.

"Alas! you will not kill me?" said she.

"No," replied the old man, "I love thee too much, little one; why, thou art the flower of my old age, the joy of my soul. Thou art my well-beloved daughter; the sight of thee does good to mine eyes, and from thee I could endure anything, be it a sorrow or a joy, provided that thou does not curse too much the poor Bruyn who has made thee a great lady, rich and honoured. Wilt thou not be a lovely widow? And thy happiness will soften the pangs of death."

And he found in his dried-up eyes still one tear which trickled quite warm down his fir-cone coloured face, and fell upon the hand of Blanche, who, grieved to behold this great love of her old spouse who would put himself under the ground to please her, said laughingly--

"There! there! don't cry, I will wait."

Thereupon the seneschal kissed her hands and regaled her with little endearments, saying with a voice quivering with emotion--

"If you knew, Blanche my darling, how I devour thee in thy sleep with caresses, now here, now there!" And the old ape patted her with his two hands, which were nothing but bones. And he continued, "I dared not waken the cat that would have strangled my happiness, since at this occupation of love I only embraced with my heart."

"Ah!" replied she, "you can fondle me thus even when my eyes are open; that has not the least effect upon me."

At these words the poor seneschal, taking the little dagger which was on the table by the bed, gave it to her, saying with passion--

"My darling, kill me, or let me believe that you love me a little!"

"Yes, yes," said she, quite frightened, "I will try to love you much."

Behold how this young maidenhood made itself master of this old man and subdued him, for in the name of the sweet face of Venus, Blanche, endowed with the natural artfulness of women, made her old Bruyn come and go like a miller's mule.

"My good Bruyn, I want this! Bruyn, I want that--go on Bruyn!" Bruyn! Bruyn! And always Bruyn in such a way that Bruyn was more worn-out by the clemency of his wife than he would have been by her unkindness. She turned his brain wishing that everything should be in scarlet, making him turn everything topsy-turvy at the least movement of her eyebrow, and when she was sad the seneschal distracted, would say to everything from his judicial seat, "Hang him!" Another would have died like a fly at this conflict with the maid's innocence, but Bruyn was of such an iron nature that it was difficult to finish him off. One evening that Blanche had turned the house upside-down, upset the men and the beasts, and would by her aggravating humour have made the eternal father desperate--he who has such

an infinite treasure of patience since he endures us--she said to the seneschal while getting into bed, "My good Bruyn, I have low down fancies, that bite and prick me; thence they rise into my heart, inflame my brain, incite me therein to evil deeds, and in the night I dream of the monk of the Carneaux."

"My dear," replied the seneschal, "these are devilries and temptations against which the monks and nuns know how to defend themselves. If you will gain salvation, go and confess to the worthy Abbot of Marmoustiers, our neighbour; he will advise you well and will holily direct you in the good way."

"Tomorrow I will go," said she.

And indeed directly it was day, she trotted off to the monastery of the good brethren, who marvelled to see among them so pretty a lady; committed more than one sin through her in the evening; and for the present led her with great ceremony to their reverend abbot.

Blanche found the said good man in a private garden near the high rock under a flower arcade, and remained stricken with respect at the countenance of the holy man, although she was accustomed not to think much of grey hairs.

"God preserve you, Madame; what can you have to seek of one so near death, you so young?"

"Your precious advice," said she, saluting him with a courtesy; "and if it will please you to guide so undutiful a sheep, I shall be well content to have so wise a confessor."

"My daughter," answered the monk, with whom old Bruyn had arranged this hypocrisy and the part to play, "if I had not the chills of a hundred winters upon this unthatched head, I should not dare to listen to your sins, but say on; if you enter paradise, it will be through me."

Then the seneschal's wife set forth the small fry of her stock in hand, and when she was purged of her little iniquities, she came to the postscript of her confession.

"Ah! my father!" said she, "I must confess to you that I am daily exercised by the desire to have a child. Is it wrong?"

"No," said the abbot.

But she went on, "It is by nature commanded to my husband not to draw from his wealth to bring about his poverty, as the old women say by the way."

"Then," replied the priest, "you must live virtuously and abstain from all thoughts of this kind."

"But I have heard it professed by the Lady of Jallanges, that it was not a sin when from it one derived neither profit nor pleasure."

"There always is pleasure," said the abbot, "but don't count upon the child as a profit. Now

fix this in your understanding, that it will always be a mortal sin before God and a crime before men to bring forth a child through the embraces of a man to whom one is not ecclesiastically married. Thus those women who offend against the holy laws of marriage, suffer great penalties in the other world, are in the power of horrible monsters with sharp and tearing claws, who thrust them into flaming furnaces in remembrance of the fact that here below they have warmed their hearts a little more than was lawful."

Thereupon Blanche scratched her ear, and having thought to herself for a little while, she said to the priest, "How then did the Virgin Mary?"

"Ah!" replied abbot, "that it is a mystery."

"And what is a mystery?"

"A thing that cannot be explained, and which one ought to believe without enquiring into it."

"Well then," said she, "cannot I perform a mystery?"

"This one," said the Abbot, "only happened once, because it was the Son of God."

"Alas! my father, is it then the will of God that I should die, or that from wise and sound comprehension my brain should be turned? Of this there is a great danger. Now in me something moves and excites me, and I am no longer in my senses. I care for nothing, and to find a man I would leap the walls, dash over the fields without shame and tear my things into tatters, only to see that which so much excited the monk of the Carneaux; and during these passions which work and prick my mind and body, there is neither God, devil, nor husband. I spring, I run, I smash up the wash-tubs, the pots, the farm implements, a fowl-house, the household things, and everything, in a way that I cannot describe. But I dare not confess to you all my misdeeds, because speaking of them makes my mouth water, and the thing with which God curses me makes me itch dreadfully. If this folly bites and pricks me, and slays my virtue, will God, who has placed this great love in my body, condemn me to perdition?"

At this question it was the priest who scratched his ear, quite dumbfounded by the lamentations, profound wisdom, controversies and intelligence that this virginity secreted.

"My daughter," said he, "God has distinguished us from the beasts and made us a paradise to gain, and for this given us reason, which is a rudder to steer us against tempests and our ambitious desires, and there is a means of easing the imaginations of one's brain by fasting, excessive labours, and other virtues; and instead of frisking and fretting like a child let loose from school, you should pray to the virgin, sleep on a hard board, attend to your household duties, and never be idle."

"Ah! my father, when I am at church in my seat, I see neither the priest nor the altar, only the infant Jesus, who brings the thing into my head. But to finish, if my head is turned and my mind wanders, I am in the lime-twigs of love."

"If thus you were," said the abbot, imprudently, "you would be in the position of Saint

Lidoire, who in a deep sleep one day, one leg here and one leg there, through the great heat and scantily attired, was approached by a young man full of mischief, who dexterously seduced her, and as of this trick the saint was thoroughly ignorant, and much surprised at being brought to bed, thinking that her unusual size was a serious malady, she did penance for it as a venial sin, as she had no pleasure in this wicked business, according to the statement of the wicked man, who said upon the scaffold where he was executed, that the saint had in nowise stirred."

"Oh, my father," said she, "be sure that I should not stir more than she did!"

With this statement she went away prettily and gracefully, smiling and thinking how she could commit a venial sin. On her return from the great monastery, she saw in the courtyard of her castle the little Jallanges, who under the superintendence of an old groom was turning and wheeling about on a fine horse, bending with the movements of the animal, dismounting and mounting again with vaults and leaps most gracefully, and with lissome thighs, so pretty, so dextrous, so upright as to be indescribable, so much so, that he would have made the Queen Lucrece long for him, she who killed herself from having been contaminated against her will.

"Ah!" said Blanche, "if only this page were fifteen, I would go to sleep comfortably very near to him."

Then, in spite of the too great youth of this charming servitor, during the collation and supper, she eyed frequently the black hair, the white skin, the grace of Rene, above all his eyes, where was an abundance of limpid warmth and a great fire of life, which he was afraid to shoot out--child that he was.

Now in the evening, as the seneschal's wife sat thoughtfully in her chair in the corner of the fireplace, old Bruyn interrogated her as to her trouble.

"I am thinking," said she, "that you must have fought the battles of love very early, to be thus completely broken up."

"Oh!" smiled he, smiling like all old men questioned upon their amorous remembrances, "at the age of thirteen and a half I had overcome the scruples of my mother's waiting woman."

Blanche wished to hear nothing more, but believed the page Rene should be equally advanced, and she was quite joyous and practised little allurements on the good man, and wallowed silently in her desire, like a cake which is being floured.

How and by Whom the Said Child was Procured

The seneschal's wife did not think long over the best way quickly to awaken the love of the page, and had soon discovered the natural ambuscade in the which the most wary are taken. This is how: at the warmest hour of the day the good man took his siesta after the Saracen fashion, a habit in which he had never failed, since his return from the Holy Land. During this time Blanche was alone in the grounds, where the women work at their minor occupations, such as broidering and stitching, and often remained in the rooms looking after the washing, putting the clothes tidy, or running about at will. Then she appointed this quiet hour to complete the education of the page, making him read books and say his prayers.

Now on the morrow, when at the mid-day hour the seneschal slept, succumbing to the sun which warms with its most luminous rays the slopes of Roche-Corbon, so much so that one is obliged to sleep, unless annoyed, upset, and continually roused by a devil of a young woman. Blanche then gracefully perched herself in the great seignorial chair of her good man, which she did not find any too high, since she counted upon the chances of perspective. The cunning jade settled herself dextrously therein, like a swallow in its nest, and leaned her head maliciously upon her arm like a child that sleeps; but in making her preparations she opened fond eyes, that smiled and winked in advance of the little secret thrills, sneezes, squints, and trances of the page who was about to lie at her feet, separated from her by the jump of an old flea; and in fact she advanced so much and so near the square of velvet where the poor child should kneel, whose life and soul she trifled with, that had he been a saint of stone, his glance would have been constrained to follow the flexuosities of the dress in order to admire and re-admire the perfections and beauties of the shapely leg, which moulded the white stocking of the seneschal's lady. Thus it was certain that a weak varlet would be taken in the snare, wherein the most vigorous knight would willingly have succumbed. When she had turned, returned, placed and displaced her body, and found the situation in which the page would be most comfortable, she cried, gently. "Rene!" Rene, whom she knew well was in the guard-room, did not fail to run in and quickly thrust his brown head between the tapestries of the door.

"What do you please to wish?" said the page. And he held with great respect in his hand his shaggy scarlet cap, less red than his fresh dimpled cheeks.

"Come hither," replied she, under her breath, for the child attracted her so strongly that she was quite overcome.

And forsooth there were no jewels so sparkling as the eyes of Rene, no vellum whiter than his skin, no woman more exquisite in shape--and so near to her desire, she found him still more sweetly formed--and was certain that the merry frolics of love would radiate well from this youth, the warm sun, the silence, et cetera.

"Read me the litanies of Madame the Virgin," said she to him, pushing an open book him on her prieu-dieu. "Let me see if you are well taught by your master."

"Do you not think the Virgin beautiful?" asked she of him, smiling when he held the illuminated prayer-book in which glowed the silver and gold.

"It is a painting," replied he, timidly, and casting a little glance upon his so gracious mistress.

"Read! read!"

Then Rene began to recite the so sweet and so mystic litanies; but you may imagine that the "Ora pro nobis" of Blanche became still fainter and fainter, like the sound of the horn in the woodlands, and when the page went on, "Oh, Rose of mystery," the lady, who certainly heard distinctly, replied by a gentle sigh. Thereupon Rene suspected that his mistress slept. Then he commenced to cover her with his regard, admiring her at his leisure, and had then no wish to utter any anthem save the anthem of love. His happiness made his heart leap and bound into his throat; thus, as was but natural, these two innocents burned one against the

other, but if they could have foreseen never would have intermingled. Rene feasted his eyes, planning in his mind a thousand fruitions of love that brought the water into his mouth. In his ecstasy he let his book fall, which made him feel as sheepish as a monk surprised at a child's tricks; but also from that he knew that Blanche was sound asleep, for she did not stir, and the wily jade would not have opened her eyes even at the greatest dangers, and reckoned on something else falling as well as the book of prayer.

There is no worse longing than the longing of a woman in certain condition. Now, the page noticed his lady's foot, which was delicately slippered in a little shoe of a delicate blue colour. She had angularly placed it on a footstool, since she was too high in the seneschal's chair. This foot was of narrow proportions, delicately curved, as broad as two fingers, and as long as a sparrow, tail included, small at the top--a true foot of delight, a virginal foot that merited a kiss as a robber does the gallows; a roguish foot; a foot wanton enough to damn an archangel; an ominous foot; a devilishly enticing foot, which gave one a desire to make two new ones just like it to perpetuate in this lower world the glorious works of God. The page was tempted to take the shoe from this persuasive foot. To accomplish this his eyes glowing with the fire of his age, went swiftly, like the clapper of a bell, from this said foot of delectation to the sleeping countenance of his lady and mistress, listening to her slumber, drinking in her respiration again and again, it did not know where it would be sweetest to plant a kiss--whether on the ripe red lips of the seneschal's wife or on this speaking foot. At length, from respect or fear, or perhaps from great love, he chose the foot, and kissed it hastily, like a maiden who dares not. Then immediately he took up his book, feeling his red cheeks redder still, and exercised with his pleasure, he cried like a blind man--"Janua coeli, : gate of Heaven." But Blanche did not move, making sure that the page would go from foot to knee, and thence to "Janua coeli, : gate of Heaven." She was greatly disappointed when the litanies finished without any other mischief, and Rene, believing he had had enough happiness for one day, ran out of the room quite lively, richer from this hardy kiss than a robber who has robbed the poor-box.

When the seneschal's lady was alone, she thought to herself that this page would be rather a long time at his task if he amused himself with the singing of the Magnificat at matins. Then she determined on the morrow to raise her foot a little, and then to bring to light those hidden beauties that are called perfect in Touraine, because they take no hurt in the open air, and are always fresh. You can imagine that the page, burned by his desire and his imagination, heated by the day before, awaited impatiently the hour to read in this breviary of gallantry, and was called; and the conspiracy of the litanies commenced again, and Blanche did not fail to fall asleep. This time the said Rene fondled with his hand the pretty limb, and even ventured so far as to verify if the polished knee and its surroundings were satin. At this sight the poor child, armed against his desire, so great was his fear, dared only to make brief devotion and curt caresses, and although he kissed softly this fair surface, he remained bashful, the which, feeling by the senses of her soul and the intelligence of her body, the seneschal's lady who took great care not to move, called out to him--"Ah, Rene, I am asleep."

Hearing what he believed to be a stern reproach, the page frightened ran away, leaving the books, the task, and all. Thereupon, the seneschal's better half added this prayer to the litany--"Holy Virgin, how difficult children are to make."

At dinner her page perspired all down his back while waiting on his lady and her lord; but

he was very much surprised when he received from Blanche the most shameless of all glances that ever woman cast, and very pleasant and powerful it was, seeing that it changed this child into a man of courage. Now, the same evening Bruyn staying a little longer than was his custom in his own apartment, the page went in search of Blanche, and found her asleep, and made her dream a beautiful dream.

He knocked off the chains that weighed so heavily upon her, and so plentifully bestowed upon her the sweets of love, that the surplus would have sufficed to render to others blessed with the joys of maternity. So then the minx, seizing the page by the head and squeezing him to her, cried out--"Oh, Rene! Thou hast awakened me!"

And in fact there was no sleep could stand against it, and it is certain that saints must sleep very soundly. From this business, without any other mystery, and by a benign faculty which is the assisting principle of spouses, the sweet and graceful plumage, suitable to cuckolds, was placed upon the head of the good husband without his experiencing the slightest shock.

After this sweet repast, the seneschal's lady took kindly to her siesta after the French fashion, while Bruyn took his according to the Saracen. But by the said siesta she learned how the good youth of the page had a better taste than that of the old seneschal, and at night she buried herself in the sheets far away from her husband, whom she found strong and stale. And from sleeping and waking up in the day, from taking siestas and saying litanies, the seneschal's wife felt growing within her that treasure for which she had so often and so ardently sighed; but now she liked more the commencement than the fructifying of it.

You may be sure that Rene knew how to read, not only in books, but in the eyes of his sweet lady, for whom he would have leaped into a flaming pile, had it been her wish he should do so. When well and amply, more than a hundred times, the train had been laid by them, the little lady became anxious about her soul and the future of her friend the page. Now one rainy day, as they were playing at touch-tag, like two children, innocent from head to foot, Blanche, who was always caught, said to him--

"Come here, Rene; do you know that while I have only committed venial sins because I was asleep, you have committed mortal ones?"

"Ah, Madame!" said he, "where then will God stow away all the damned if that is to sin!"

Blanche burst out laughing, and kissed his forehead.

"Be quiet, you naughty boy; it is a question of paradise, and we must live there together if you wish always to be with me."

"Oh, my paradise is here."

"Leave off," said she. "You are a little wretch--a scapegrace who does not think of that which I love--yourself! You do not know that I am with child, and that in a little while I shall be no more able to conceal it than my nose. Now, what will the abbot say? What will my lord say? He will kill you if he puts himself in a passion. My advice is little one, that you go to the abbot of Marmoustiers, confess your sins to him, asking him to see what had better be done concerning my seneschal."

"Alas," said the artful page, "if I tell the secret of our joys, he will put his interdict upon our love."

"Very likely," said she; "but thy happiness in the other world is a thing so precious to me."

"Do you wish it my darling?"

"Yes," replied she rather faintly.

"Well, I will go, but sleep again that I may bid you adieu."

And the couple recited the litany of Farewells as if they had both foreseen that their love must finish in its April. And on the morrow, more to save his dear lady than to save himself, and also to obey her, Rene de Jallanges set out towards the great monastery.

How the Said Love-Sin was Repented of and Led to Great Mourning

"Good God!" cried the abbot, when the page had chanted the Kyrie eleison of his sweet sins, "thou art the accomplice of a great felony, and thou has betrayed thy lord. Dost thou know page of darkness, that for this thou wilt burn through all eternity? and dost thou know what it is to lose forever the heaven above for a perishable and changeful moment here below? Unhappy wretch! I see thee precipitated for ever in the gulfs of hell unless thou payest to God in this world that which thou owest him for such offence."

Thereupon the good old abbot, who was of that flesh of which saints are made, and who had great authority in the country of Touraine, terrified the young man by a heap of representations, Christian discourses, remembrances of the commandments of the Church, and a thousand eloquent things--as many as a devil could say in six weeks to seduce a maiden--but so many that Rene, who was in the loyal fervour of innocence, made his submission to the good abbot. The said abbot, wishing to make forever a good and virtuous man of this child, now in a fair way to be a wicked one, commanded him first to go and prostrate himself before his lord, to confess his conduct to him, and then if he escaped from this confession, to depart instantly for the Crusades, and go straight to the Holy Land, where he should remain fifteen years of the time appointed to give battle to the Infidels.

"Alas, my reverend father," said he, quite unmoved, "will fifteen years be enough to acquit me of so much pleasure? Ah! If you knew, I have had joy enough for a thousand years."

"God will be generous. Go," replied the old abbot, "and sin no more. On this account ego te absolvo."

Poor Rene returned thereupon with great contrition to the castle of Roche-Carbon and the first person he met was the seneschal, who was polishing up his arms, helmets, gauntlets, and other things. He was sitting on a great marble bench in the open air, and was amusing himself by making shine again the splendid trappings which brought back to him the merry pranks in the Holy Land, the good jokes, and the wenches, et cetera. When Rene fell upon his knees before him, the good lord was much astonished.

"What is it?" said he.

"My lord," replied Rene, "order these people to retire.

Honore de Balzac

How the Good Man Bruyn Took a Wife

Messire Bruyn, he who completed the Castle of Roche-Carbon-les- Vouvray, on the banks of the Loire, was a boisterous fellow in his youth. When quite little, he squeezed young ladies, turned the house out of windows, and played the devil with everything, when he was called upon to put his Sire the Baron of Roche-Carbon some few feet under the turf. Then he was his own master, free to lead a life of wild dissipation, and indeed he worked very hard to get a surfeit of enjoyment. Now by making his crowns sweat and his goods scarce, draining his land, and a bleeding his hogsheads, and regaling frail beauties, he found himself excommunicated from decent society, and had for his friends only the plunderers of towns and the Lombardians. But the usurers turned rough and bitter as chestnut husks, when he had no other security to give them than his said estate of Roche-Carbon, since the Rupes Carbonis was held from our Lord the king. Then Bruyn found himself just in the humour to give a blow here and there, to break a collar-bone or two, and quarrel with everyone about trifles. Seeing which, the Abbot of Marmoustiers, his neighbour, and a man liberal with his advice, told him that it was an evident sign of lordly perfection, that he was walking in the right road, but if he would go and slaughter, to the great glory of God, the Mahommedans who defiled the Holy Land, it would be better still, and that he would undoubtedly return full of wealth and indulgences into Touraine, or into Paradise, whence all barons formerly came.

The said Bruyn, admiring the great sense of the prelate, left the country equipped by the monastery, and blessed by the abbot, to the great delight of his friends and neighbours. Then he put to the sack enough many towns of Asia and Africa, and fell upon the infidels without giving them warning, burning the Saracens, the Greeks, the English, and others, caring little whether they were friends or enemies, or where they came from, since among his merits he had that of being in no way curious, and he never questioned them until after he had killed them. At this business, agreeable to God, to the King and to himself, Bruyn gained renown as a good Christian and loyal knight, and enjoyed himself thoroughly in these lands beyond the seas, since he more willingly gave a crown to the girls than to the poor, although he met many more poor people than perfect maids; but like a good Touranian he made soup of anything. At length, when he was satiated with the Turks, relics, and other blessings of the Holy Land, Bruyn, to the great astonishment of the people of Vouvrillons, returned from the Crusades laden with crowns and precious stones; rather differently from some who, rich when they set out, came back heavy with leprosy, but light with gold. On his return from Tunis, our Lord, King Philippe, made him a Count, and appointed him his seneschal in our country and that of Poitou. There he was greatly beloved and properly thought well of, since over and above his good qualities he founded the Church of the Carmes-Deschaulx, in the parish of Egrignolles, as the peace-offering to Heaven for the follies of his youth. Thus was he cardinally consigned to the good graces of the Church and of God. From a wicked youth and reckless man, he became a good, wise man, and discreet in his dissipations and pleasures; rarely was in anger, unless someone blasphemed God before him, the which he would not tolerate because he had blasphemed enough for every one in his wild youth. In short, he never quarrelled, because, being

seneschal, people gave up to him instantly. It is true that he at that time beheld all his desires accomplished, the which would render even an imp of Satan calm and tranquil from his horns to his heels. And besides this he possessed a castle all jagged at the corners, and shaped and pointed like a Spanish doublet, situated upon a bank from which it was reflected in the Loire. In the rooms were royal tapestries, furniture, Saracen pomps, vanities, and inventions which were much admired by people of Tours, and even by the archbishop and clerks of St. Martin, to whom he sent as a free gift a banner fringed with fine gold. In the neighbourhood of the said castle abounded fair domains, wind-mills, and forests, yielding a harvest of rents of all kinds, so that he was one of the strongest knights-banneret of the province, and could easily have led to battle for our lord the king a thousand men. In his old days, if by chance his bailiff, a diligent man at hanging, brought before him a poor peasant suspected of some offence, he would say, smiling--

"Let this one go, Brediff, he will count against those I inconsiderately slaughtered across the seas"; oftentimes, however, he would let them bravely hang on a chestnut tree or swing on his gallows, but this was solely that justice might be done, and that the custom should not lapse in his domain. Thus the people on his lands were good and orderly, like fresh veiled nuns, and peaceful since he protected them from the robbers and vagabonds whom he never spared, knowing by experience how much mischief is caused by these cursed beasts of prey. For the rest, most devout, finishing everything quickly, his prayers as well as good wine, he managed the processes after the Turkish fashion, having a thousand little jokes ready for the losers, and dining with them to console them. He had all the people who had been hanged buried in consecrated ground like godly ones, some people thinking they had been sufficiently punished by having their breath stopped. He only persecuted the Jews now and then, and when they were glutted with usury and wealth. He let them gather their spoil as the bees do honey, saying that they were the best of tax-gatherers. And never did he despoil them save for the profit and use of the churchmen, the king, the province, or himself.

This jovial way gained for him the affection and esteem of every one, great and small. If he came back smiling from his judicial throne, the Abbot of Marmoustiers, an old man like himself, would say, "Ho, ha! messire, there is some hanging on since you laugh thus!" And when coming from Roche-Corbon to Tours he passed on horseback along the Fauborg St. Symphorien, the little girls would say, "Ah! this is the justice day, there is the good man Bruyn," and without being afraid they would look at him astride on a big white hack, that he had brought back with him from the Levant. On the bridge the little boys would stop playing with the ball, and would call out, "Good day, Mr. Seneschal" and he would reply, jokingly, "Enjoy yourselves, my children, until you get whipped." "Yes, Mr. Seneschal."

Also he made the country so contented and so free from robbers that during the year of the great over-flowing of the Loire there were only twenty-two malefactors hanged that winter, not counting a Jew burned in the Commune of Chateau-Neuf for having stolen a consecrated wafer, or bought it, some said, for he was very rich.

One day, in the following year about harvest time, or mowing time, as we say in Touraine, there came Egyptians, Bohemians, and other wandering troupes who stole the holy things from the Church of St. Martin, and in the place and exact situation of Madam the Virgin, left by way of insult and mockery to our Holy Faith, an abandoned pretty little girl, about the age of an old dog, stark naked, an acrobat, and of Moorish descent like themselves. For this almost nameless crime it was equally decided by the king, people, and the churchmen

that the Mooress, to pay for all, should be burned and cooked alive in the square near the fountain where the herb market is. Then the good man Bruyn clearly and dextrously demonstrated to the others that it would be a thing most profitable and pleasant to God to gain over this African soul to the true religion, and if the devil were lodged in this feminine body the faggots would be useless to burn him, as said the said order. To which the archbishop sagely thought most canonical and conformable to Christian charity and the gospel. The ladies of the town and other persons of authority said loudly that they were cheated of a fine ceremony, since the Mooress was crying her eyes out in the jail and would certainly be converted to God in order to live as long as a crow, if she were allowed to do so, to which the seneschal replied that if the foreigner would wholly commit herself to the Christian religion there would be a gallant ceremony of another kind, and that he would undertake that it should be royally magnificent, because he would be her sponsor at the baptismal font, and that a virgin should be his partner in the affair in order the better to please the Almighty, while himself was reputed never to have lost the bloom or innocence, in fact to be a coquebin. In our country of Touraine thus are called the young virgin men, unmarried or so esteemed to distinguish them from the husbands and the widowers, but the girls always pick them without the name, because they are more light-hearted and merry than those seasoned in marriage.

The young Mooress did not hesitate between the flaming faggots and the baptismal water. She much preferred to be a Christian and live than be Egyptian and be burned; thus to escape a moment's baking, her heart would burn unquenched through all her life, since for the greater surety of her religion she was placed in the convent of nuns near Chardonneret, where she took the vow of sanctity. The said ceremony was concluded at the residence of the archbishop, where on this occasion, in honour of the Saviour or men, the lords and ladies of Touraine hopped, skipped and danced, for in this country the people dance, skip, eat, flirt, have more feasts and make merrier than any in the whole world. The good old seneschal had taken for his associate the daughter of the lord of Azay-le-Ridel, which afterwards became Azay-le-Brusle, the which lord being a Crusader was left before Acre, a far distant town, in the hands of a Saracen who demanded a royal ransom for him because the said lord was of high position.

The lady of Azay having given his estate as security to the Lombards and extortioners in order to raise the sum, remained, without a penny in the the world, awaiting her lord in a poor lodging in the town, without a carpet to sit upon, but proud as the Queen of Sheba and brave as a mastiff who defends the property of his master. Seeing this great distress the seneschal went delicately to request this lady's daughter to be the godmother of the said Egyptian, in order that he might have the right of assisting the Lady of Azay. And, in fact, he kept a heavy chain of gold which he had preserved since the commencement of the taking of Cyprus, and the which he determined to clasp about the neck of his pretty associate, but he hung there at the same time his domain, and his white hairs, his money and his horses; in short, he placed there everything he possessed, directly he had seen Blanche of Azay dancing a pavan among the ladies of Tours. Although the Moorish girl, making the most of her last day, had astonished the assembly by her twists, jumps, steps, springs, and elevations and artistic efforts, Blanche had the advantage of her, as everyone agreed, so virginally and delicately did she dance.

Now Bruyn, admiring this gentle maiden whose toes seemed to fear the boards, and who amused herself so innocently for her seventeen years-- like a grasshopper trying her first

note--was seized with an old man's desire; a desire apoplectic and vigorous from weakness, which heated him from the sole of foot to the nape of his neck--for his head had too much snow on the top of it to let love lodge there. Then the good man perceived that he needed a wife in his manor, and it appeared more lonely to him than it was. And what then was a castle without a chatelaine? As well have a clapper without its bell. In short, a wife was the only thing that he had to desire, so he wished to have one promptly, seeing that if the Lady of Azay made him wait, he had just time to pass out of this world into the other. But during the baptismal entertainment, he thought little of his severe wounds, and still less of the eighty years that had stripped his head; he found his eyes clear enough to see distinctly his young companion, who, following the injunctions of the Lady of Azay, regaled him well with glance and gesture, believing there could be no danger near so old a fellow, in such wise that Blanche--naive and nice as she was in contradistinction to the girls of Touraine, who are as wide-awake as a spring morning--permitted the good man first to kiss her hand, and afterwards her neck, rather low-down; at least so said the archbishop who married them the week after; and that was a beautiful bridal, and a still more beautiful bride.

The said Blanche was slender and graceful as no other girl, and still better than that, more maidenly than ever maiden was; a maiden all ignorant of love, who knew not why or what it was; a maiden who wondered why certain people lingered in their beds; a maiden who believed that children were found in parsley beds. Her mother had thus reared her in innocence, without even allowing her to consider, trifle as it was, how she sucked in her soup between her teeth. Thus she was a sweet flower, and intact, joyous and innocent; an angel, who needed but the wings to fly away to Paradise. When she left the poor lodging of her weeping mother to consummate her betrothal at the cathedral of St. Gatien and St. Maurice, the country people came to a feast their eyes upon the bride, and on the carpets which were laid down all along the Rue de la Scellerie, and all said that never had tinier feet pressed the ground of Touraine, prettier eyes gazed up to heaven, or a more splendid festival adorned the streets with carpets and with flowers. The young girls of St. Martin and of the boroughs of Chateau- Neuf, all envied the long brown tresses with which doubtless Blanche had fished for a count, but much more did they desire the gold embroidered dress, the foreign stones, the white diamonds, and the chains with which the little darling played, and which bound her for ever to the said seneschal. The old soldier was so merry by her side, that his happiness showed itself in his wrinkles, his looks, and his movements. Although he was hardly as straight as a billhook, he held himself so by the side of Blanche, that one would have taken him for a soldier on parade receiving his officer, and he placed his hand on his diaphragm like a man whose pleasure stifles and troubles him. Delighted with the sound of the swinging bells, the procession, the poms, and the vanities of the said marriage, which was talked of long after the episcopal rejoicings, the women desired a harvest of Moorish girls, a deluge of old seneschals, and baskets full of Egyptian baptisms. But this was the only one that ever happened in Touraine, seeing that the country is far from Egypt and from Bohemia. The Lady of Azay received a large sum of money after the ceremony, which enabled her to start immediately for Acre to go to her spouse, accompanied by the lieutenant and soldiers of the Count of Roche- Corbon, who furnished them with everything necessary. She set out on the day of the wedding, after having placed her daughter in the hands of the seneschal, enjoining him to treat her well; and later on she returned with the Sire d'Azay, who was leprous, and she cured him, tending him herself, running the risk of being contaminated, the which was greatly admired.

The marriage ceremony finished and at an end--for it lasted three days, to the great

contentment of the people--Messire Bruyn with great pomp led the little one to his castle, and, according to the custom of husbands, had her put solemnly to bed in his couch, which was blessed by the Abbot of Marmoustiers; then came and placed himself beside her in the great feudal chamber of Roche-Corbon, which had been hung with green blockade and ribbon of golden wire. When old Bruyn, perfumed all over, found himself side by side with his pretty wife, he kissed her first upon the forehead, and then upon the little round, white breast, on the same spot where she had allowed him to clasp the fastenings of the chain, but that was all. The old fellow had too great confidence in himself in fancying himself able to accomplish more; so then he abstained from love in spite of the merry nuptial songs, the epithalamiums and jokes which were going on in the rooms beneath where the dancing was still kept up. He refreshed himself with a drink of the marriage beverage, which according to custom, had been blessed and placed near them in a golden cup. The spices warmed his stomach well enough, but not the heart of his dead ardour. Blanche was not at all astonished at the demeanour of her spouse, because she was a virgin in mind, and in marriage she saw only that which is visible to the eyes of young girls--namely dresses, banquets, horses, to be a lady and mistress, to have a country seat, to amuse oneself and give orders; so, like the child that she was, she played with the gold tassels on the bed, and marvelled at the richness of the shrine in which her innocence should be interred. Feeling, a little later in the day, his culpability, and relying on the future, which, however, would spoil a little every day that with which he pretended to regale his wife, the seneschal tried to substitute the word for the deed. So he entertained his wife in various ways, promised her the keys of his sideboards, his granaries and chests, the perfect government of his houses and domains without any control, hanging round her neck "the other half of the loaf," which is the popular saying in Touraine. She became like a young charger full of hay, found her good man the most gallant fellow in the world, and raising herself upon her pillow began to smile, and beheld with greater joy this beautiful green brocaded bed, where henceforward she would be permitted, without any sin, to sleep every night. Seeing she was getting playful, the cunning lord, who had not been used to maidens, but knew from experience the little tricks that women will practice, seeing that he had much associated with ladies of the town, feared those handy tricks, little kisses, and minor amusements of love which formerly he did not object to, but which at the present time would have found him cold as the obit of a pope. Then he drew back towards the end of the bed, afraid of his happiness, and said to his too delectable spouse, "Well, darling, you are a seneschal's wife now, and very well seneschaled as well."

"Oh no!" said she.

"How no!" replied he in great fear; "are you not a wife?"

"No!" said she. "Nor shall I be till I have had a child."

"Did you while coming here see the meadows?" began again the old fellow.

"Yes," said she.

"Well, they are yours."

"Oh! Oh!" replied she laughing, "I shall amuse myself much there catching butterflies."

"That's a good girl," says her lord. "And the woods?"

"Ah! I should not like to be there alone, you will take me there. But," said she, "give me a little of that liquor which La Ponneuse has taken such pains to prepare for us."

"And why, my darling? It would put fire in your body."

"Oh! That's what I should like," said she, biting her lip with vexation, "because I desire to give you a child as soon as possible; and I'm sure that liquor is good for the purpose."

"Ah! my little one," said the seneschal, knowing by this that Blanche was a virgin from head to foot, "the goodwill of God is necessary for this business, and women must be in a state of harvest."

"And when should I be in a state of harvest?" asked she, smiling.

"When nature so wills it," said he, trying to laugh.

"What is it necessary to do for this?" replied she.

"Ah! A cabalistical and alchemical operation which is very dangerous."

"Ah!" said she, with a dreamy look, "that's the reason why my mother cried when thinking of the said metamorphosis; but Bertha de Breuilly, who is so thankful for being made a wife, told me it was the easiest thing in the world."

"That's according to the age," replied the old lord. "But did you see at the stable the beautiful white mare so much spoken of in Touraine?"

"Yes, she is very gentle and nice."

"Well, I give her to you, and you can ride her as often as the fancy takes you."

"Oh, you are very kind, and they did not lie when they told me so."

"Here," continued he, "sweetheart; the butler, the chaplain, the treasurer, the equerry, the farrier, the bailiff, even the Sire de Montsoreau, the young varlet whose name is Gauttier and bears my banner, with his men at arms, captains, followers, and beasts--all are yours, and will instantly obey your orders under pain of being incommoded with a hempen collar."

"But," replied she, "this mysterious operation--cannot it be performed immediately?"

"Oh no!" replied the seneschal. "Because it is necessary above all things that both the one and the other of us should be in a state of grace before God; otherwise we should have a bad child, full of sin; which is forbidden by the canons of the church. This is the reason that there are so many incorrigible scapegraces in the world. Their parents have not wisely waited to have their souls pure, and have given wicked souls to their children. The beautiful and the virtuous come of immaculate fathers; that is why we cause our beds to be blessed, as the Abbot of Marmoustiers has done this one. Have you not transgressed the ordinances

of the Church?"

"Oh no," said she, quickly, "I received before Mass absolution for all my faults and have remained since without committing the slightest sin."

"You are very perfect," said the cunning lord, "and I am delighted to have you for a wife; but I have sworn like an infidel."

"Oh! and why?"

"Because the dancing did not finish, and I could not have you to myself to bring you here and kiss you."

Thereupon he gallantly took her hands and covered them with kisses, whispering to her little endearments and superficial words of affection which made her quite pleased and contented.

Then, fatigued with the dance and all the ceremonies, she settled down to her slumbers, saying to the seneschal--

"I will take care tomorrow that you shall not sin," and she left the old man quite smitten with her white beauty, amorous of her delicate nature, and as embarrassed to know how he should be able to keep her in her innocence as to explain why oxen chew their food twice over. Although he did not augur to himself any good therefrom, it inflamed him so much to see the exquisite perfections of Blanche during her innocent and gentle sleep, that he resolved to preserve and defend this pretty jewel of love. With tears in his eyes he kissed her sweet golden tresses, the beautiful eyelids, and her ripe red mouth, and he did it softly for fear of waking her. There was all his fruition, the dumb delight which still inflamed his heart without in the least affecting Blanche. Then he deplored the snows of his leafless old age, the poor old man, that he saw clearly that God had amused himself by giving him nuts when his teeth were gone.

How the Seneschal Struggled with His Wife's Modesty

During the first days of his marriage the seneschal imprinted many fibs to tell his wife, whose so estimable innocence he abused. Firstly, he found in his judicial functions good excuses for leaving her at times alone; then he occupied himself with the peasants of the neighbourhood, and took them to dress the vines on his lands at Vouvray, and at length pampered her up with a thousand absurd tales.

At one time he would say that lords did not behave like common people, that the children were only planted at certain celestial conjunctions ascertained by learned astrologers; at another that one should abstain from begetting children on feast days, because it was a great undertaking; and he observed the feasts like a man who wished to enter into Paradise without consent. Sometimes he would pretend that if by chance the parents were not in a state of grace, the children commenced on the date of St. Claire would be blind, of St. Gatien had the gout, of St. Agnes were scaldheaded, of St. Roch had the plague; sometimes that those begotten in February were chilly; in March, too turbulent; in April, were worth nothing at all; and that handsome boys were conceived in May. In short, he wished his child to be perfect, to have his hair of two colours; and for this it was necessary that all the

required conditions should be observed. At other times he would say to Blanche that the right of a man was to bestow a child upon his wife according to his sole and unique will, and that if she pretended to be a virtuous woman she should conform to the wishes of her husband; in fact it was necessary to await the return of the Lady of Azay in order that she should assist at the confinement; from all of which Blanche concluded that the seneschal was annoyed by her requests, and was perhaps right, since he was old and full of experience; so she submitted herself and thought no more, except to herself, of this so much-desired child, that is to say, she was always thinking of it, like a woman who has a desire in her head, without suspecting that she was behaving like a gay lady or a town-walker running after her enjoyment. One evening, by accident, Bruyn spoke of children, a discourse that he avoided as cats avoid water, but he was complaining of a boy condemned by him that morning for great misdeeds, saying for certain he was the offspring of people laden with mortal sins.

"Alas!" said Blanche, "if you will give me one, although you have not got absolution, I will correct so well that you will be pleased with him."

Then the count saw that his wife was bitten by a warm desire, and that it was time to dissipate her innocence in order to make himself master of it, to conquer it, to beat it, or to appease and extinguish it.

"What, my dear, you wish to be a mother?" said he; "you do not yet know the business of a wife, you are not accustomed to being mistress of the house."

"Oh! Oh!" said she, "to be a perfect countess, and have in my loins a little count, must I play the great lady? I will do it, and thoroughly."

Then Blanche, in order to obtain issue, began to hunt the fawns and stags, leaping the ditches, galloping upon her mare over valleys and mountain, through the woods and the fields, taking great delight in watching the falcons fly, in unhooding them and while hunting always carried them gracefully upon her little wrist, which was what the seneschal had desired. But in this pursuit, Blanche gained an appetite of nun and prelate, that is to say, wished to procreate, had her desires whetted, and could scarcely restrain her hunger, when on her return she gave play to her teeth. Now by reason of reading the legends written by the way, and of separating by death the embraces of birds and wild beasts, she discovered a mystery of natural alchemy, while colouring her complexion, and superagitating her feeble imagination, which did little to pacify her warlike nature, and strongly tickled her desire which laughed, played, and frisked unmistakably. The seneschal thought to disarm the rebellious virtue of his wife by making her scour the country; but his fraud turned out badly, for the unknown lust that circulated in the veins of Blanche emerged from these assaults more hardy than before, inviting jousts and tourneys as the herald the armed knight.

The good lord saw then that he had grossly erred and that he was now upon the horns of a dilemma; also he no longer knew what course to adopt; the longer he left it the more it would resist. From this combat, there must result one conquered and one contused--a diabolical contusion which he wished to keep distant from his physiognomy by God's help until after his death. The poor seneschal had already great trouble to follow his lady to the chase, without being dismounted; he sweated under the weight of his trappings, and almost expired in that pursuit wherein his frisky wife cheered her life and took great pleasure.

Many times in the evening she wished to dance. Now the good man, swathed in his heavy clothing, found himself quite worn out with these exercises, in which he was constrained to participate either in giving her his hand, when she performed the vaults of the Moorish girl, or in holding the lighted fagot for her, when she had a fancy to do the torchlight dance; and in spite of his sciaticas, accretions, and rheumatisms, he was obliged to smile and say to her some gentle words and gallantries after all the evolutions, mummeries, and comic pantomimes, which she indulged in to divert herself; for he loved her so madly that if she had asked him for an impossibility he would have sought one for her immediately.

Nevertheless, one fine day he recognised the fact that his frame was in a state of too great debility to struggle with the vigorous nature of his wife, and humiliating himself before his wife's virtue he resolved to let things take their course, relying a little upon the modesty, religion, and bashfulness of Blanche, but he always slept with one eye open, for he suspected that God had perhaps made virginities to be taken like partridges, to be spitted and roasted. One wet morning, when the weather was that in which the snails make their tracks, a melancholy time, and suitable to reverie, Blanche was in the house sitting in her chair in deep thought, because nothing produces more lively concoctions of the substantive essences, and no receipt, specific or philter is more penetrating, transpiercing or doubly transpiercing and titillating than the subtle warmth which simmers between the nap of the chair and a maiden sitting during certain weather.

Now without knowing it the Countess was incommoded by her innocence, which gave more trouble than it was worth to her brain, and gnawed her all over. Then the good man, seriously grieved to see her languishing, wished to drive away the thoughts which were ultra-conjugal principles of love.

"Whence comes your sadness, sweetheart?" said he.

"From shame."

"What then affronts you?"

"The not being a good woman; because I am without a child, and you without lineage! Is one a lady without progeny? Nay! Look! . . . All my neighbours have it, and I was married to have it, as you to give it to me; the nobles of Touraine are all amply furnished with children, and their wives give them lapfuls, you alone have none, they laugh at you there. What will become of your name and your fiefs and your seigniories? A child is our natural company; it is a delight to us to make a fright of it, to fondle it, to swaddle it, to dress and undress it, to cuddle it, to sing it lullabies, to cradle it, to get it up, to put it to bed, and to nourish it, and I feel that if I had only the half of one, I would kiss it, swaddle it, and unharness it, and I would make it jump and crow all day long, as the other ladies do."

"Were it not that in giving them birth women die, and that for this you are still too delicate and too close in the bud, you would already be a mother," replied the seneschal, made giddy with the flow of words. "But will you buy one ready-made?--that will cost you neither pain nor labour."

"But," said she, "I want the pain and labour, without which it will not be ours. I know very well it should be the fruit of my body, because at church they say that Jesus was the fruit of

the Virgin's womb."

"Very well, then pray God that it may be so," cried the seneschal, "and intercede with the Virgin of Egrignolles. Many a lady has conceived after the neuvaine; you must not fail to do one."

Then the same day Blanche set out towards Notre-Dame de l'Egrignolles, decked out like a queen riding her beautiful mare, having on her a robe of green velvet, laced down with fine gold lace, open at the breast, having sleeves of scarlet, little shoes and a high hat ornamented with precious stones, and a gold waistband that showed off her little waist, as slim as a pole. She wished to give her dress to Madame the Virgin, and in fact promised it to her, for the day of her churching. The Sire de Montsoreau galloped before her, his eye bright as that of a hawk, keeping the people back and guarding with his knights the security of the journey. Near Marmoustiers the seneschal, rendered sleepy by the heat, seeing it was the month of August, waggled about in his saddle, like a diadem upon the head of a cow, and seeing so frolicsome and so pretty a lady by the side of so old a fellow, a peasant girl, who was squatting near the trunk of a tree and drinking water out of her stone jug inquired of a toothless old hag, who picked up a trifle by gleanings, if this princess was going to bury her dead.

"Nay," said the old woman, "it is our lady of Roche-Corbon, wife of the seneschal of Poitou and Touraine, in quest of a child."

"Ah! Ah!" said the young girl, laughing like a fly just satisfied; then pointing to the handsome knight who was at the head of the procession--"he who marches at the head would manage that; she would save the wax-candles and the vow."

"Ha! my little one," replied the hag, "I am rather surprised that she should go to Notre-Dame de l'Egrignolles seeing that there are no handsome priests there. She might very well stop for a short time beneath the shadow the belfry of Marmoustiers; she would soon be fertile, those good fathers are so lively."

"By a nun's oath!" said a tramp walking up, "look; the Sire de Montsoreau is lively and delicate enough to open the lady's heart, the more so as he is well formed to do so."

And all commenced a laugh. The Sire de Montsoreau wished to go to them and hang them in lime-tree by the road as a punishment for their bad words, but Blanche cried out quickly--

"Oh, sir, do not hang them yet. They have not said all they mean; and we shall see them on our return."

She blushed, and the Sire de Montsoreau looked at her eagerly, as though to shoot into her the mystic comprehensions of love, but the clearing out of her intelligence had already been commenced by the sayings of the peasants which were fructifying in her understanding--her innocence was like touchwood, there was only need for a word to inflame it.

Thus Blanche perceived now the notable and physical differences between the qualities of her old husband and perfections of the said Gauttier, a gentleman who was not over affected

with his twenty-three years, but held himself upright as a ninepin in the saddle, and as wide-awake as the matin chimes, while in contrast to him, slept the seneschal; he had courage and dexterity there where his master failed. He was one of those smart fellows whom the jades would sooner wear at night than a leathern garment, because they then no longer fear the fleas; there are some who vituperate them, but no one should be blamed, because every one should sleep as he likes.

So much did the seneschal's lady think, and so imperially well, that by the time she arrived at the bridge of Tours, she loved Gauttier secretly, as a maiden loves, without suspecting that it is love. From that she became a proper woman, that is to say, she desired the good of others, the best that men have, she fell into a fit of love-sickness, going at the first jump to the depth of her misery, seeing that all is flame between the first coveting and the last desire, and she knew not how she then learned that by the eyes can flow in a subtle essence, causing such powerful corrosions in all the veins of the body, recesses of the heart, nerves of the members, roots of the hair, perspiration of the substance, limbo of the brain, orifices of the epidermis, windings of the pluck, tubes of the hypochondriac and other channels which in her was suddenly dilated, heated, tickled, envenomed, clawed, harrowed, and disturbed, as if she had a basketful of needles in her inside. This was a maiden's desire, a well-conditioned desire, which troubled her sight to such a degree that she no longer saw her old spouse, but clearly the young Gauttier, whose nature was as ample as the glorious chin of an abbot. When the good man entered Tours the Ah! Ah! of the crowd woke him up, and he came with great pomp with his suite to the Church of Notre-Dame de l'Egrignolles, formerly called la greigneur, as if you said that which has the most merit. Blanche went into the chapel where children are asked to God and of the Virgin, and went there alone, as was the custom, always however in the presence of the seneschal, of his varlets and the loiterers who remained outside the grill. When the countess saw the priest come who had charge of the masses said for children, and who received the said vows, she asked him if there were many barren women. To which the good priest replied, that he must not complain, and that the children were good revenue to the Church.

"And do you often see," said Blanche, "young women with such old husbands as my lord?"

"Rarely," said he.

"But have those obtained offspring?"

"Always," replied the priest smiling.

"And the others whose companions are not so old?"

"Sometimes."

"Oh! Oh!" said she, "there is more certainty then with one like the seneschal?"

"To be sure," said the priest.

"Why?" said she.

"Madame," gravely replied priest, "before that age God alone interferes with the affair,

after, it is the men."

At this time it was a true thing that all the wisdom had gone to the clergy. Blanch made her vow, which was a very profitable one, seeing that her decorations were worth quite two thousand gold crowns.

"You are very joyful!" said the old seneschal to her when on the home journey she made her mare prance, jump, and frisk.

"Yes, yes!" said she. "There is no longer any doubt about my having a child, because any one can help me, the priest said: I shall take Gauttier."

The seneschal wished to go and slay the monk, but he thought that was a crime which would cost him too much, and he resolved cunningly to arrange his vengeance with the help of the archbishop; and before the housetops of Roche-Corbon came in sight he had ordered the Sire de Montsoreau to seek a little retirement in his own country, which the young Gauttier did, knowing the ways of the lord. The seneschal put in the place of the said Gauttier the son of the Sire de Jallanges, whose fief was held from Roche-Corbon. He was a young boy named Rene, approaching fourteen years, and he made him a page, awaiting the time when he should be old enough to be an equerry, and gave the command of his men to an old cripple, with whom he had knocked about a great deal in Palestine and other places. Thus the good man believed he would avoid the horned trappings of cuckoldom, and would still be able to girth, bridle, and curb the factious innocence of his wife, which struggled like a mule held by a rope.

That Which is Only a Venial Sin

The Sunday following the arrival of Rene at the manor of Roche-Corbon, Blanche went out hunting without her goodman, and when she was in the forest near Les Carneaux, saw a monk who appeared to be pushing a girl about more than was necessary, and spurred on her horse, saying to her people, "Ho there! Don't let him kill her." But when the seneschal's lady arrived close to them, she turned her horse's head quickly and the sight she beheld prevented her from hunting. She came back pensive, and then the lantern of her intelligence opened, and received a bright light, which made a thousand things clear, such as church and other pictures, fables, and lays of the troubadours, or the domestic arrangements of birds; suddenly she discovered the sweet mystery of love written in all languages, even in that of the Carps'. Is it not silly thus to seal this science from maidens? Soon Blanche went to bed, and soon said she to the seneschal--

"Bruyn, you have deceived me, you ought to behave as the monk of the Carneaux behaved to the girl."

Old Bruyn suspected the adventure, and saw well that his evil hour was at hand. He regarded Blanche with too much fire in his eyes for the same ardour to be lower down, and answered her softly--

"Alas! sweetheart, in taking you for my wife I had more love than strength, and I have taken advantage of your clemency and virtue. The great sorrow of my life is to feel all my capability in my heart only. This sorrow hastens my death little by little, so that you will soon be free. Wait for my departure from this world. That is the sole request that he makes

of you, he who is your master, and who could command you, but who wishes only to be your prime minister and slave. Do not betray the honour of my white hairs! Under these circumstances there have been lords who have slain their wives.

"Alas! you will not kill me?" said she.

"No," replied the old man, "I love thee too much, little one; why, thou art the flower of my old age, the joy of my soul. Thou art my well-beloved daughter; the sight of thee does good to mine eyes, and from thee I could endure anything, be it a sorrow or a joy, provided that thou does not curse too much the poor Bruyn who has made thee a great lady, rich and honoured. Wilt thou not be a lovely widow? And thy happiness will soften the pangs of death."

And he found in his dried-up eyes still one tear which trickled quite warm down his fir-cone coloured face, and fell upon the hand of Blanche, who, grieved to behold this great love of her old spouse who would put himself under the ground to please her, said laughingly--

"There! there! don't cry, I will wait."

Thereupon the seneschal kissed her hands and regaled her with little endearments, saying with a voice quivering with emotion--

"If you knew, Blanche my darling, how I devour thee in thy sleep with caresses, now here, now there!" And the old ape patted her with his two hands, which were nothing but bones. And he continued, "I dared not waken the cat that would have strangled my happiness, since at this occupation of love I only embraced with my heart."

"Ah!" replied she, "you can fondle me thus even when my eyes are open; that has not the least effect upon me."

At these words the poor seneschal, taking the little dagger which was on the table by the bed, gave it to her, saying with passion--

"My darling, kill me, or let me believe that you love me a little!"

"Yes, yes," said she, quite frightened, "I will try to love you much."

Behold how this young maidenhood made itself master of this old man and subdued him, for in the name of the sweet face of Venus, Blanche, endowed with the natural artfulness of women, made her old Bruyn come and go like a miller's mule.

"My good Bruyn, I want this! Bruyn, I want that--go on Bruyn!" Bruyn! Bruyn! And always Bruyn in such a way that Bruyn was more worn-out by the clemency of his wife than he would have been by her unkindness. She turned his brain wishing that everything should be in scarlet, making him turn everything topsy-turvy at the least movement of her eyebrow, and when she was sad the seneschal distracted, would say to everything from his judicial seat, "Hang him!" Another would have died like a fly at this conflict with the maid's innocence, but Bruyn was of such an iron nature that it was difficult to finish him off. One evening that Blanche had turned the house upside-down, upset the men and the beasts, and

would by her aggravating humour have made the eternal father desperate--he who has such an infinite treasure of patience since he endures us--she said to the seneschal while getting into bed, "My good Bruyn, I have low down fancies, that bite and prick me; thence they rise into my heart, inflame my brain, incite me therein to evil deeds, and in the night I dream of the monk of the Carneaux."

"My dear," replied the seneschal, "these are devilries and temptations against which the monks and nuns know how to defend themselves. If you will gain salvation, go and confess to the worthy Abbot of Marmoustiers, our neighbour; he will advise you well and will holily direct you in the good way."

"Tomorrow I will go," said she.

And indeed directly it was day, she trotted off to the monastery of the good brethren, who marvelled to see among them so pretty a lady; committed more than one sin through her in the evening; and for the present led her with great ceremony to their reverend abbot.

Blanche found the said good man in a private garden near the high rock under a flower arcade, and remained stricken with respect at the countenance of the holy man, although she was accustomed not to think much of grey hairs.

"God preserve you, Madame; what can you have to seek of one so near death, you so young?"

"Your precious advice," said she, saluting him with a courtesy; "and if it will please you to guide so undutiful a sheep, I shall be well content to have so wise a confessor."

"My daughter," answered the monk, with whom old Bruyn had arranged this hypocrisy and the part to play, "if I had not the chills of a hundred winters upon this unthatched head, I should not dare to listen to your sins, but say on; if you enter paradise, it will be through me."

Then the seneschal's wife set forth the small fry of her stock in hand, and when she was purged of her little iniquities, she came to the postscript of her confession.

"Ah! my father!" said she, "I must confess to you that I am daily exercised by the desire to have a child. Is it wrong?"

"No," said the abbot.

But she went on, "It is by nature commanded to my husband not to draw from his wealth to bring about his poverty, as the old women say by the way."

"Then," replied the priest, "you must live virtuously and abstain from all thoughts of this kind."

"But I have heard it professed by the Lady of Jallanges, that it was not a sin when from it one derived neither profit nor pleasure."

"There always is pleasure," said the abbot, "but don't count upon the child as a profit. Now fix this in your understanding, that it will always be a mortal sin before God and a crime before men to bring forth a child through the embraces of a man to whom one is not ecclesiastically married. Thus those women who offend against the holy laws of marriage, suffer great penalties in the other world, are in the power of horrible monsters with sharp and tearing claws, who thrust them into flaming furnaces in remembrance of the fact that here below they have warmed their hearts a little more than was lawful."

Thereupon Blanche scratched her ear, and having thought to herself for a little while, she said to the priest, "How then did the Virgin Mary?"

"Ah!" replied abbot, "that it is a mystery."

"And what is a mystery?"

"A thing that cannot be explained, and which one ought to believe without enquiring into it."

"Well then," said she, "cannot I perform a mystery?"

"This one," said the Abbot, "only happened once, because it was the Son of God."

"Alas! my father, is it then the will of God that I should die, or that from wise and sound comprehension my brain should be turned? Of this there is a great danger. Now in me something moves and excites me, and I am no longer in my senses. I care for nothing, and to find a man I would leap the walls, dash over the fields without shame and tear my things into tatters, only to see that which so much excited the monk of the Carneaux; and during these passions which work and prick my mind and body, there is neither God, devil, nor husband. I spring, I run, I smash up the wash-tubs, the pots, the farm implements, a fowl-house, the household things, and everything, in a way that I cannot describe. But I dare not confess to you all my misdeeds, because speaking of them makes my mouth water, and the thing with which God curses me makes me itch dreadfully. If this folly bites and pricks me, and slays my virtue, will God, who has placed this great love in my body, condemn me to perdition?"

At this question it was the priest who scratched his ear, quite dumbfounded by the lamentations, profound wisdom, controversies and intelligence that this virginity secreted.

"My daughter," said he, "God has distinguished us from the beasts and made us a paradise to gain, and for this given us reason, which is a rudder to steer us against tempests and our ambitious desires, and there is a means of easing the imaginations of one's brain by fasting, excessive labours, and other virtues; and instead of frisking and fretting like a child let loose from school, you should pray to the virgin, sleep on a hard board, attend to your household duties, and never be idle."

"Ah! my father, when I am at church in my seat, I see neither the priest nor the altar, only the infant Jesus, who brings the thing into my head. But to finish, if my head is turned and my mind wanders, I am in the lime-twigs of love."

"If thus you were," said the abbot, imprudently, "you would be in the position of Saint Lidoire, who in a deep sleep one day, one leg here and one leg there, through the great heat and scantily attired, was approached by a young man full of mischief, who dexterously seduced her, and as of this trick the saint was thoroughly ignorant, and much surprised at being brought to bed, thinking that her unusual size was a serious malady, she did penance for it as a venial sin, as she had no pleasure in this wicked business, according to the statement of the wicked man, who said upon the scaffold where he was executed, that the saint had in nowise stirred."

"Oh, my father," said she, "be sure that I should not stir more than she did!"

With this statement she went away prettily and gracefully, smiling and thinking how she could commit a venial sin. On her return from the great monastery, she saw in the courtyard of her castle the little Jallanges, who under the superintendence of an old groom was turning and wheeling about on a fine horse, bending with the movements of the animal, dismounting and mounting again with vaults and leaps most gracefully, and with lissome thighs, so pretty, so dextrous, so upright as to be indescribable, so much so, that he would have made the Queen Lucrece long for him, she who killed herself from having been contaminated against her will.

"Ah!" said Blanche, "if only this page were fifteen, I would go to sleep comfortably very near to him."

Then, in spite of the too great youth of this charming servitor, during the collation and supper, she eyed frequently the black hair, the white skin, the grace of Rene, above all his eyes, where was an abundance of limpid warmth and a great fire of life, which he was afraid to shoot out--child that he was.

Now in the evening, as the seneschal's wife sat thoughtfully in her chair in the corner of the fireplace, old Bruyn interrogated her as to her trouble.

"I am thinking," said she, "that you must have fought the battles of love very early, to be thus completely broken up."

"Oh!" smiled he, smiling like all old men questioned upon their amorous remembrances, "at the age of thirteen and a half I had overcome the scruples of my mother's waiting woman."

Blanche wished to hear nothing more, but believed the page Rene should be equally advanced, and she was quite joyous and practised little allurements on the good man, and wallowed silently in her desire, like a cake which is being floured.

How and by Whom the Said Child was Procured

The seneschal's wife did not think long over the best way quickly to awaken the love of the page, and had soon discovered the natural ambuscade in the which the most wary are taken. This is how: at the warmest hour of the day the good man took his siesta after the Saracen fashion, a habit in which he had never failed, since his return from the Holy Land. During this time Blanche was alone in the grounds, where the women work at their minor occupations, such as brodering and stitching, and often remained in the rooms looking after the washing, putting the clothes tidy, or running about at will. Then she appointed this quiet

hour to complete the education of the page, making him read books and say his prayers. Now on the morrow, when at the mid-day hour the seneschal slept, succumbing to the sun which warms with its most luminous rays the slopes of Roche-Carbon, so much so that one is obliged to sleep, unless annoyed, upset, and continually roused by a devil of a young woman. Blanche then gracefully perched herself in the great seignorial chair of her good man, which she did not find any too high, since she counted upon the chances of perspective. The cunning jade settled herself dextrously therein, like a swallow in its nest, and leaned her head maliciously upon her arm like a child that sleeps; but in making her preparations she opened fond eyes, that smiled and winked in advance of the little secret thrills, sneezes, squints, and trances of the page who was about to lie at her feet, separated from her by the jump of an old flea; and in fact she advanced so much and so near the square of velvet where the poor child should kneel, whose life and soul she trifled with, that had he been a saint of stone, his glance would have been constrained to follow the flexuosities of the dress in order to admire and re-admire the perfections and beauties of the shapely leg, which moulded the white stocking of the seneschal's lady. Thus it was certain that a weak varlet would be taken in the snare, wherein the most vigorous knight would willingly have succumbed. When she had turned, returned, placed and displaced her body, and found the situation in which the page would be most comfortable, she cried, gently. "Rene!" Rene, whom she knew well was in the guard-room, did not fail to run in and quickly thrust his brown head between the tapestries of the door.

"What do you please to wish?" said the page. And he held with great respect in his hand his shaggy scarlet cap, less red than his fresh dimpled cheeks.

"Come hither," replied she, under her breath, for the child attracted her so strongly that she was quite overcome.

And forsooth there were no jewels so sparkling as the eyes of Rene, no vellum whiter than his skin, no woman more exquisite in shape--and so near to her desire, she found him still more sweetly formed--and was certain that the merry frolics of love would radiate well from this youth, the warm sun, the silence, et cetera.

"Read me the litanies of Madame the Virgin," said she to him, pushing an open book him on her prieu-dieu. "Let me see if you are well taught by your master."

"Do you not think the Virgin beautiful?" asked she of him, smiling when he held the illuminated prayer-book in which glowed the silver and gold.

"It is a painting," replied he, timidly, and casting a little glance upon his so gracious mistress.

"Read! read!"

Then Rene began to recite the so sweet and so mystic litanies; but you may imagine that the "Ora pro nobis" of Blanche became still fainter and fainter, like the sound of the horn in the woodlands, and when the page went on, "Oh, Rose of mystery," the lady, who certainly heard distinctly, replied by a gentle sigh. Thereupon Rene suspected that his mistress slept. Then he commenced to cover her with his regard, admiring her at his leisure, and had then no wish to utter any anthem save the anthem of love. His happiness made his heart leap and

bound into his throat; thus, as was but natural, these two innocents burned one against the other, but if they could have foreseen never would have intermingled. Rene feasted his eyes, planning in his mind a thousand fruitions of love that brought the water into his mouth. In his ecstasy he let his book fall, which made him feel as sheepish as a monk surprised at a child's tricks; but also from that he knew that Blanche was sound asleep, for she did not stir, and the wily jade would not have opened her eyes even at the greatest dangers, and reckoned on something else falling as well as the book of prayer.

There is no worse longing than the longing of a woman in certain condition. Now, the page noticed his lady's foot, which was delicately slipped in a little shoe of a delicate blue colour. She had angularly placed it on a footstool, since she was too high in the seneschal's chair. This foot was of narrow proportions, delicately curved, as broad as two fingers, and as long as a sparrow, tail included, small at the top--a true foot of delight, a virginal foot that merited a kiss as a robber does the gallows; a roguish foot; a foot wanton enough to damn an archangel; an ominous foot; a devilishly enticing foot, which gave one a desire to make two new ones just like it to perpetuate in this lower world the glorious works of God. The page was tempted to take the shoe from this persuasive foot. To accomplish this his eyes glowing with the fire of his age, went swiftly, like the clapper of a bell, from this said foot of delectation to the sleeping countenance of his lady and mistress, listening to her slumber, drinking in her respiration again and again, it did not know where it would be sweetest to plant a kiss--whether on the ripe red lips of the seneschal's wife or on this speaking foot. At length, from respect or fear, or perhaps from great love, he chose the foot, and kissed it hastily, like a maiden who dares not. Then immediately he took up his book, feeling his red cheeks redder still, and exercised with his pleasure, he cried like a blind man--"Janua coeli,; gate of Heaven." But Blanche did not move, making sure that the page would go from foot to knee, and thence to "Janua coeli,; gate of Heaven." She was greatly disappointed when the litanies finished without any other mischief, and Rene, believing he had had enough happiness for one day, ran out of the room quite lively, richer from this hardy kiss than a robber who has robbed the poor-box.

When the seneschal's lady was alone, she thought to herself that this page would be rather a long time at his task if he amused himself with the singing of the Magnificat at matins. Then she determined on the morrow to raise her foot a little, and then to bring to light those hidden beauties that are called perfect in Touraine, because they take no hurt in the open air, and are always fresh. You can imagine that the page, burned by his desire and his imagination, heated by the day before, awaited impatiently the hour to read in this breviary of gallantry, and was called; and the conspiracy of the litanies commenced again, and Blanche did not fail to fall asleep. This time the said Rene fondled with his hand the pretty limb, and even ventured so far as to verify if the polished knee and its surroundings were satin. At this sight the poor child, armed against his desire, so great was his fear, dared only to make brief devotion and curt caresses, and although he kissed softly this fair surface, he remained bashful, the which, feeling by the senses of her soul and the intelligence of her body, the seneschal's lady who took great care not to move, called out to him--"Ah, Rene, I am asleep."

Hearing what he believed to be a stern reproach, the page frightened ran away, leaving the books, the task, and all. Thereupon, the seneschal's better half added this prayer to the litany--"Holy Virgin, how difficult children are to make."

At dinner her page perspired all down his back while waiting on his lady and her lord; but he was very much surprised when he received from Blanche the most shameless of all glances that ever woman cast, and very pleasant and powerful it was, seeing that it changed this child into a man of courage. Now, the same evening Bruyn staying a little longer than was his custom in his own apartment, the page went in search of Blanche, and found her asleep, and made her dream a beautiful dream.

He knocked off the chains that weighed so heavily upon her, and so plentifully bestowed upon her the sweets of love, that the surplus would have sufficed to render to others blessed with the joys of maternity. So then the minx, seizing the page by the head and squeezing him to her, cried out--"Oh, Rene! Thou hast awakened me!"

And in fact there was no sleep could stand against it, and it is certain that saints must sleep very soundly. From this business, without any other mystery, and by a benign faculty which is the assisting principle of spouses, the sweet and graceful plumage, suitable to cuckolds, was placed upon the head of the good husband without his experiencing the slightest shock.

After this sweet repast, the seneschal's lady took kindly to her siesta after the French fashion, while Bruyn took his according to the Saracen. But by the said siesta she learned how the good youth of the page had a better taste than that of the old seneschal, and at night she buried herself in the sheets far away from her husband, whom she found strong and stale. And from sleeping and waking up in the day, from taking siestas and saying litanies, the seneschal's wife felt growing within her that treasure for which she had so often and so ardently sighed; but now she liked more the commencement than the fructifying of it.

You may be sure that Rene knew how to read, not only in books, but in the eyes of his sweet lady, for whom he would have leaped into a flaming pile, had it been her wish he should do so. When well and amply, more than a hundred times, the train had been laid by them, the little lady became anxious about her soul and the future of her friend the page. Now one rainy day, as they were playing at touch-tag, like two children, innocent from head to foot, Blanche, who was always caught, said to him--

"Come here, Rene; do you know that while I have only committed venial sins because I was asleep, you have committed mortal ones?"

"Ah, Madame!" said he, "where then will God stow away all the damned if that is to sin!"

Blanche burst out laughing, and kissed his forehead.

"Be quiet, you naughty boy; it is a question of paradise, and we must live there together if you wish always to be with me."

"Oh, my paradise is here."

"Leave off," said she. "You are a little wretch--a scapegrace who does not think of that which I love--yourself! You do not know that I am with child, and that in a little while I shall be no more able to conceal it than my nose. Now, what will the abbot say? What will my lord say? He will kill you if he puts himself in a passion. My advice is little one, that you go to the abbot of Marmoustiers, confess your sins to him, asking him to see what had

better be done concerning my seneschal.

"Alas," said the artful page, "if I tell the secret of our joys, he will put his interdict upon our love."

"Very likely," said she; "but thy happiness in the other world is a thing so precious to me."

"Do you wish it my darling?"

"Yes," replied she rather faintly.

"Well, I will go, but sleep again that I may bid you adieu."

And the couple recited the litany of Farewells as if they had both foreseen that their love must finish in its April. And on the morrow, more to save his dear lady than to save himself, and also to obey her, Rene de Jallanges set out towards the great monastery.

How the Said Love-Sin was Repented of and Led to Great Mourning

"Good God!" cried the abbot, when the page had chanted the Kyrie eleison of his sweet sins, "thou art the accomplice of a great felony, and thou has betrayed thy lord. Dost thou know page of darkness, that for this thou wilt burn through all eternity? and dost thou know what it is to lose forever the heaven above for a perishable and changeful moment here below? Unhappy wretch! I see thee precipitated for ever in the gulfs of hell unless thou payest to God in this world that which thou owest him for such offence."

Thereupon the good old abbot, who was of that flesh of which saints are made, and who had great authority in the country of Touraine, terrified the young man by a heap of representations, Christian discourses, remembrances of the commandments of the Church, and a thousand eloquent things--as many as a devil could say in six weeks to seduce a maiden--but so many that Rene, who was in the loyal fervour of innocence, made his submission to the good abbot. The said abbot, wishing to make forever a good and virtuous man of this child, now in a fair way to be a wicked one, commanded him first to go and prostrate himself before his lord, to confess his conduct to him, and then if he escaped from this confession, to depart instantly for the Crusades, and go straight to the Holy Land, where he should remain fifteen years of the time appointed to give battle to the Infidels.

"Alas, my reverend father," said he, quite unmoved, "will fifteen years be enough to acquit me of so much pleasure? Ah! If you knew, I have had joy enough for a thousand years."

"God will be generous. Go," replied the old abbot, "and sin no more. On this account ego te absolvo."

Poor Rene returned thereupon with great contrition to the castle of Roche-Carbon and the first person he met was the seneschal, who was polishing up his arms, helmets, gauntlets, and other things. He was sitting on a great marble bench in the open air, and was amusing himself by making shine again the splendid trappings which brought back to him the merry pranks in the Holy Land, the good jokes, and the wenchings, et cetera. When Rene fell upon his knees before him, the good lord was much astonished.

"What is it?" said he.

"My lord," replied Rene, "order these people to retire.

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